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Outline History of the Ukrainian Communist Party (Independentists): An Emancipatory Communism 1918-1925

Christopher Ford

This article examines an aspect of the Russian and East European Revolutions that has been largely overlooked by historians. That of the Independentist Ukrainian Marxists who challenged both the Russian Communists and the Ukrainian nationalists in their quest for an independent Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. Originating in Ukrainian Social-Democracy, the *Nezalezhnyky* (Independentists) anticipated many of the ideas of the communist oppositions¹ who sought to reassert the libertarian goals of the revolution. Struggling first within the Ukrainian Peoples Republic then the Ukrainian SSR, their campaign had international ramifications and gained the support Bela Kun's Soviet Hungary. In 1919, commanding a section of the Red Army the *Nezalezhnyky* led a pro-soviet rebellion larger and far more serious than the Kronstadt uprising. Organised as the Ukrainian Communist Party, between 1919-1925 they were the last legal-opposition party in the USSR. In the face of harassment they were the only communists to explicitly advocate a theory of permanent revolution and developed a concept of proletarian hegemony. They opposed NEP as return to capitalist advocating soviet democracy and a self-governing of Ukraine. The history and ideas of these Marxist's provides a new insight into the fate of the Russian, Ukrainian and East European revolutions.

The aim of this article is to give a concise chronological history of the UKP, *Ukrayinska Komunistychna Partiya Nezalezhnyky* (Ukrainian Communist Party Independentists), in the course of the Ukrainian revolution of 1917-1921 and the early years of the USSR, *Ukrayinska Sotsialistychna Radyans'ka Respublika* (Ukrainian Socialist Council Republic).¹

¹ From 1937-1991 Soviet Ukraine was known in Ukrainian as - *Ukrayins'ka Radyans'ka Sotsialistychna Respublika*, and in Russian as *Ukrainskaya Sovetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika* (USSR).

The Nezalezhnyky, which emerged from the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers Party (USDRP), played a significant role in the revolution; they held positions in the governments of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. They challenged both the Ukrainian nationalists and Russian Bolsheviks, in 1919 leading a pro-soviet rising on a scale far greater than that in Kronstadt in 1921. They continued to be a thorn in the side of the authorities until 1925 when they were disbanded by the Russian Communist Party (RKP(B)), by means of the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

In general, the history of the UKP or Nezalezhnyky has been seriously neglected. No exhaustive work has been published either in Ukraine or abroad. In the 1920s, which saw important historical work in the Ukrainian SSR, the UKP was still a legal opposition party, an outsider under constant harassment.² While Ukrainian Social Democracy was not entirely absent, any sympathetic or objective account of the Nezalezhnyky remained beyond acceptable boundaries.³ After 1933 history was encaged within the parameters of *partiinost* and served as a source of legitimacy for the state-socialist regime. It was not until 1968 that the only history of the Nezalezhnyky was published in Soviet Ukraine, written by Volodymyr Chyrko, entitled "The Failure of the Ideology and Politics of the Nationalist Party Ukapisty".⁴ In the entire period from 1968 to 1991 the Nezalezhnyky never featured in historiography other than as an enemy.

Very few of the works of the Ukrainian émigrés discussed the Nezalezhnyky. They featured in the writings of the former members of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers Party (USDRP); Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Rebirth of a Nation*, and also Mykola Halahan who published a short essay on "The Liquidation of the UKP" in 1925.⁵ The most extensive, in terms of original texts, was Pavlo Khrystiuk's *Notes and Materials on the History of the Ukrainian Revolution 1919-1920*.⁶ It remains a primary source to this day. Ivan Maistrenko,

² In the face of the opposition of the All-Union Politburo a separate historiography of the ruling Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine took shape. On the one hand this historiography was marred by a trait of ascribing to this party "the entire previous history of all revolutionary movements (workers', peasants', etc)", while on the other hand it broached the question of the "independent origins and evolution of the KP(b)U and also of a separate history of the Ukrainian working and peasants classes, Ukrainian revolutionary movement and the Ukrainian Revolution 1917-1921" (Jurij, 1953). The driving force behind this was the Ukrainian element of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine (KP(b)U) at whose initiative the All-Ukrainian Committee for the Study of Party History (Istpart) of the Central Committee was founded in January 1922 (Lawrynenko XIII).

³ Butsenko; Medvedev; Avdiyenko. There were accounts of the rise of Ukrainian Social Democracy, most notably the works of Yosyf Hermaize, a former member of the USDRP and Secretary of the historical section of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (VUAN), under M. Hrushevsky. His most notable work was *Narys z istorii revoliutsiinoho rukhu na Ukraini*, Kyiv, 1926. He emphasised the distinctive qualities of the Ukrainian movement. This was to prove the key text on the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party (RUP) and beginnings of Ukrainian Social Democracy, he was unable to complete his study. Hermaize was subjected to a campaign of denunciation by the leading KP(b)U historian Matvi Yavorsky who polemicalised against his alleged Ukrainian exclusiveness and failure to take account of Russian influences.

⁴ Chyrko "Krakh ideolohii ta polityky natsionalistychnoi partii ukapistiv".

⁵ Vynnychenko *Vidrodzheniia natsii*; Halahan "Likvidatsiya UKP".

⁶ Khrystiuk *Pavlo Zamitky i materialy do istorii ukrains'koi revoliutsii 1917-1920*.

the sole surviving member of the UKP Central Committee of 1920 discussed the Nezalezhnyky in his history of *Borotbism*.⁷ He also edited a collection of *Documents of Ukrainian Communism* including the UKP Memorandum to the Comintern in 1920, and dedicates a chapter to the Nezalezhnyky in *History of My Generation: Memoirs of a Participant in the Revolutionary Events in Ukraine*.⁸ In the post-war period several works contained micro-histories of the Nezalezhnyky: Matthew Stachiw's *Ukraine and the European Turmoil*, Jurij Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine 1917-1923* and James Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation, National Communism in Soviet Ukraine 1918-1933*.⁹ A notable exception to the Soviet and national historiography is *Bolsheviks in Ukraine, the Second Campaign 1918-1919* by Arthur E. Adams.¹⁰ Several historical works were produced by Ukrainian socialists in the diaspora, such as the unpublished study of Marko Bojcun and the work of the Polish socialist Zbigniew Kowalewski.¹¹ In independent Ukraine interest in Ukrainian Social Democracy has re-emerged slowly; Oleksandr Visotskii's *Ukrainian Social-Democrats and SR's* focuses mainly on the moderate wing of the USDRP.¹² However, a valuable volume edited by P. Bachinsky, *Documents of Ukraine's Tragic History (1917-1927)* has reproduced rare archival materials of the Nezalezhnyky.¹³

While the Nezalezhnyky remains one of the least known of the currents which emerged in the period of the Russian Revolution, in contemporary Ukraine it remains a subject of some controversy; the Communist Party of Ukraine which claims to be the "heir of the ideas and tradition" of the former ruling Party, ran a special issue of *Komunist Ukrainy* dedicated to the rebuttal of the Nezalezhnyky.¹⁴ They characterised it as part of an effort, past and present, to weaken their party through "endeavours to create a so-called 'Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP)'" and branded this as "anti-communism" linked to the "restoration of capitalism".¹⁵

⁷ Maistrenko *Borotbism*.

⁸ Maistrenko *Istoriia Moho Pokolinnia* Chapter IX.

⁹ Stachiw; Borys; Mace; see also Hunczak. In fact no Ukrainian communists at the time defined themselves "national communists"; both the UKP and the Foreign Group of the UKP explicitly rejected the term as one they ascribed to chauvinist traits in the communism of the imperialist states Russia and Germany. This refutation of "national communism" is argued by Levynsky ("Sotsiialistychna revoliutsiia i Ukraina"), and by Andriy Richytsky and H. Lapchinsky in a letter from the TsK UKP of 30 April 1921 (Richytsky and Lapchinsky).

¹⁰ Adams 93.

¹¹ Bojcun "The Working Class"; Kowalewski; see also Bojcun "Approaches to the Study of the Ukrainian Revolution".

¹² Visotskii *Ukrainski sotsial-demokrati ta eseri*.

¹³ Bachinsky *Dokumenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukraini*.

¹⁴ This was a reassertion of the Soviet paradigm of historiography of the revolution, with articles by Lyubovets; Richytskiy; Skripnik.

¹⁵ As part of manoeuvres in the Ukrainian parliament there was a rumour that certain oligarchs were going to organise a Communist Party under the name of Ukrainian Communist Party, a throwback to the communist party independent of the Bolsheviks.

Historical Antecedents—Contours and Cleavages in Ukrainian Marxism

The *Nezalezhnyky* [Independentists] refers to the title by which a current of Ukrainian Marxists defined themselves who first organised as the *Nezalezhnyky* Faction of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers Party, then from March 1919 as the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers Party *Nezalezhnyky*, re-launched as the Ukrainian Communist Party in December 1919.

The formation of the *Nezalezhnyky* has traditionally been seen as originating in the clash of contending perspectives within the USDRP in 1918-1919, set in the context of the world revolutionary wave which accompanied the severe post-war crisis. While the *Nezalezhnyky* saw this as an important conjuncture they did not consider themselves so narrowly; describing themselves to the Comintern in 1924 the UKP leaders Andriy (Pisotsky) Richytsky and Antin Drahomyretsky wrote:

The UKP has a 24-year history of its existence—beginning from the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party (1900-1905) through the USDRP (1905-1919) and finally the UKP, which is its revolutionary successor, although there are a few old members of the USDRP whom remained in the mire of the Second International and some ceased their political existence.¹⁶

Historians of various schools have tended to accept the characterisation of the *Nezalezhnyky* as a “sovietophile” splinter that diverged from the USDRP traditions.¹⁷ It is my contention that the *Nezalezhnyky* should be considered in their own terms, that is as a re-articulation of the Ukrainian Marxist tradition. This is not so easily defined; after all we can find longstanding Russian, Polish and Jewish representatives of the Marxist tradition organised on the territory of Ukraine, within both the Russian Empire and Austrian-ruled Galicia and Bukovyna. According to John-Paul Himka:

The Ukrainian Marxist tradition was a particular Branch of a larger tradition which Perry Anderson refers to as “Classical Marxism” (as distinct from Western Marxism). According to Anderson at least three features characterize classical Marxism. First, it flourished in a specific geographical locale: Central and Eastern Europe. The languages of its great texts were German, Russian and to a lesser extent, Polish. Second it flourished in a specific period: from the late nineteenth century to the 1930’s. Its representatives were for the most part murdered or silenced by Stalin or Hitler. Third, its chief thematic concerns were historical, political and economic, in contrast to the philosophical bent of Western Marxism.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Lyst TsK Vikonomy Kominternu Pro Vzayemovidnostini Mizh UKP i KP(b)U*, 27 August 1924 (Bachinskyi 523).

¹⁷ This was espoused by figures as such as Isaak Mazepa and Panas Fadenko, the moderate leaders of the émigré group of the USDRP, continued by historians of the national school, key texts being: Stachiw, Borys, Hunczak, Mace.

¹⁸ Himka 140-41.

Ukrainian Marxism can be considered within the Marxist tradition in Ukraine in a broad sense; it can also be defined in a narrower sense, that is, of a particular trend of the vernacular movement that existed in the period from the International Working Men's Association through to the Ukrainian revolution of 1917-1921. This current consciously organised as a distinctly Ukrainian Social Democratic/communist organisation; it was not until the impact of the Ukrainian revolution that we find a wider layer of revolutionaries, notably the Bolsheviks identifying themselves as Ukrainian; the core of the Ukrainian Marxist tradition remained within the original nucleus.¹⁹ Roman Rosdolsky (1898-1967), probably the best-known Ukrainian Marxist, considered:

All Ukrainian Marxism (although this is a rather wide concept) in one way or another emerged from Drahomanovism, i.e., from populism. (This was our specific Ukrainian "local colour.") Therefore, for all of them the passage to Marxism was bound up with a battle (often a very painful and drawn-out battle) against Drahomanovist traditions.²⁰

We may add to Rosdolsky's observations that it emerged particularly from an engagement with Russian populism, though many of its characteristics as opposed to being residual populism were in fact more consistent with Marx's original notions than many of the aspects of post-Marx Marxism.²¹ Key features of the ideas that permeated the Ukrainian Marxist tradition were:

- Emancipatory ideals of a universal liberation—the social, national, political, moral, cultural, liberation of the worker and peasant masses.
- Principles of self-emancipation expressed in terms of both the "national principle" of Ukrainian workers' self-organisation and an independent working class perspective for social change, distinct and separate from other parties and external powers.

¹⁹ While Georgii Plekhanov has been credited with being the "father of Russian Marxism", he was in fact neither the first Marxist theorist nor the first to popularise Marx's ideas in the Russian Empire. That was Mykola Ziber, a member of the Hromada of Kyiv: with Ziber we find the genesis of the Ukrainian Marxist tradition. The embryo of organised Marxism was already developing in the activity of Ziber and Serhii Podolynsky the precursor of Ukrainian Marxism when they set up a study group on Marx's economics in 1870.

²⁰ Rosdolsky *Nonhistoric Peoples* 13 n. 48.

²¹ Serhii Podolynsky's vision articulated a vision of a future socialist order of "communal self-government" which would "transfer land to the peasant communes and of the factories to the workers artels". Roman Serbyn, In defense of an independent Ukrainian socialist movement: Three letters from Serhii Podolynsky to Valerian Smirnov', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 1982. p.20. Similarly Marx had emphasised that the peasant commune could be saved by serving as a "point of departure" within a communist revolution in Russia, the success of which was conditional upon a corresponding "proletarian revolution in the West". Given such a linkage Russia could avoid going through the vicissitudes of capitalism. Marx, *First Draft of Letter To Vera Zasulich*, March 1881; Marxist Internet Archive: <http://www.marxiste.org/archive/marx/works/1881/03/zasulich1.htm> This was in contrast to Plekhanov's economic determinist antagonism to the peasant commune and statist and authoritarian conception of the "dictatorship of the proletariat".

- Conceptions of workers' and peasants' self-management of a communal, cooperative economy within a self-governing Ukraine.²²
- The view that agrarian preponderance diminished neither the revolutionary potential of the peasantry nor their contribution to the socialist project with the developing working class.
- Upholding internationalist principles, with linkages to international socialism through its various organisational initiatives, opposition to imperialism and locating the Ukrainian revolution in an international framework.²³

These ideas were not necessarily adhered to consistently in a comprehensive manner; there were ruptures and various efforts to reassert these principles. Such positions as on the national question, the subjective forces of the revolution and the nature of the post-revolutionary order marked a point of demarcation with Russian Marxism.²⁴ The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDRP) demanded the subordination of all Marxists to a single party—*their own*. As a corollary their leaders supported the assimilation of workers into the Russian nation as historically progressive and refused to challenge the integrity of the Russian Empire.²⁵ In contrast the Ukrainian Marxists took up the national question as a task of the immediate, minimum programme of Social Democracy, considering that the advent of communist society would promote a springtime of nations and national culture. In this regard they were strongly influenced by the Austrian Marxists such as Otto Bauer on the

²² Mykola Porsh wrote in 1907: "Workers' parties in Russia and abroad demand that land, water resources and all the natural deposits should be alienated from the large owners and passed into communal use. They propose to create communal, cooperative or municipal economy instead of the wasteful and detrimental capitalist order. The people would greatly benefit from this communal property" (96). Mykola Porsh, *Pro Avtonomiyu Ukrainy*, Kyiv, Prosvita, 1907, p.96.

²³ Podolynsky participated in the International Working Mens Association; the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party and USDRP participated in the Second International and the Zimmerwald movement.

²⁴ The antagonism of the Russian Social Democracy towards Ukrainian socialism was deep rooted. It can be traced to the very inception of both movements in the nineteenth century. Indeed it brought Engels into conflict with Plekhanov, when he failed to support Ukrainian national rights. This revealing conflict arose in 1890 over Engels's essay, "The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom". Plekhanov replied criticising Engels for his consideration of Ukrainians as a nation. Engels had come to believe that one positive outcome of the overthrow of Tsarism would be that "Little Russia [Ukraine] will be able to choose its political connections freely". The following year Plekhanov published *O Bezvykhodnosti Uukrainskago Sotsializma v Rossii*. It depicted the Russian conquest of Ukraine as an economic necessity and the Ukrainian movement as utopian with no historical basis: "The abolition of serfdom, universal conscription, the development of commerce and industry, ... the influence of urban life and civilization—these are the factors that have definitively merged the rural population of Ukraine, even linguistically, ... into a sphere of influences shared with Russia" (cited in Rosdolsky *Nonhistoric Peoples* 189).

²⁵ There is no complete study of the Ukrainian question in these debates. Works which cover this period include: V. Levynsky, *L'internationale socialiste et les peuples opprimés*, Vienna, 1920, A. Karpenko, *Lenin's Theory of The National Question And Its Contradictions*, *META*, 2 No. 3-4, 1979, M. Yurkevich, 'A Forerunner of National Communism: Lev Yurkevych (1885-1918)', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 7:1, spring 1982. Lenin's *Struggle For Revolutionary international*, *Monad*, 1986, Lev Rybalka (Yurkevych) 'Rosiiski marksysty i ukrainskyi rukh', *Dzvin* 7-8. 1913.

national question and party organisation.²⁶ The USDRP's sister party in Galicia, the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party (USDP), formed a component of the federal Social Democratic Party of Austria.²⁷

The question of the weight of emphasis on the social and national spheres proved to be a repeated source of tension.²⁸ Conversely, as a theory of liberation in a subjugated nation this stand strengthened the more emancipatory attributes of Ukrainian Marxism. It was enriched by being open to other currents, which significantly deviated, at times unacknowledged, from the constraints of the established Marxism of the Second International. While populism was rejected as an attempt at turning back the clock, so too was an economic determinism, warning against viewing things "through the prism of distorted Russian Marxism".²⁹ They developed their perspective through comparative studies of those socialists confronting situations similar to their own, such as in Ireland, Italy, Hungary and France.³⁰ The USDRP criticised the Russian Marxists for "limiting themselves to an ideological connection exclusively with the labour movement of Germany".³¹ A leading theorist and organiser of the USDRP Lev Yurkevych summarised the Party in the following terms:

A second constitutional congress of the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party took place in 1905 and adopted the maximum Erfurt programme of the German Social-Democrats and the minimum programme of the Russian Social-Democracy. It demanded extreme democratic autonomy for the territory within the ethnographic boundaries of Ukraine, with legal guarantees for the free development for the national minorities living within its territory. The principle of national organization was based on the organizational model of the Austrian Social-Democracy. With regard to tactics, the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party took the same position as the left wing of the Russian Social-Democracy (Bolsheviks), and instead of calling itself the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party, adopted the name

²⁶ The Social Democratic Workers Party of Austria (SPO) congress at Brno stated that Austria was to be transformed into a democratic federative state of nationalities (Bauer *Question of Nationalities*, London, 2000, 422). The founding programme of the USDRP demanded the "right of every nation to cultural and political self-determination" and that Russia be transformed into a "Democratic Republic" with broad "local and territorial self-government for the whole population of the state" in which there would be "equal rights of all languages at schools, courts, local administrative and government institutions" (Stalittia, 94-101).

²⁷ Bauer himself wrote an analysis, "Ukrainian Social Democracy" in the Polish socialist paper *Naprzód* 9 Jan. 1912.

²⁸ Symptomatic was the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party (RUP) where Mykola Mikhnovsky, prioritising independence, led a split in 1902, his ideas being branded "zoological nationalism". The RUP fractured again in 1905, with the Ukrainian Social Democratic Union or Spilka led by M. Melenevsky-Basok forming an autonomous section of the RSDRP (Mensheviks). The Spilka saw the national question as an auxiliary issue. Though initially successful Spilka was relegated to the role of peasant organisers and suggested it became an All-Russian section (see Boshyk).

²⁹ *Haslo* No. 3, 1903 (cited in Boshyk 171).

³⁰ The Agrarian Program of the French Workers Party was republished as an RUP pamphlet with an introduction by D. Antonovych in 1903, *Agrarna programa Frantsuzkoi robitnychoi Partii*, Biblioteka Haslo, Chernivtsi, 1903. Werner Sombart's *Socialism and the Social Movement*, was republished by *Moloda Ukraina* in Lviv, Galicia in 1899.

³¹ Lev Yurkevych, *Peredmovia*, Volodymyr Levynsky, *Narys Rozvytki Ukrainskoho Rukh v Halychnyia*, Dzvyn, Kyiv (1914).

Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, the name under which it still exists today, and to which the authors of this letter belong.³²

To adopt a later category, Ukrainian Marxism represented a current closer to what Hal Draper described as the egalitarian strand of "socialism from below" in contrast to the elitist "socialism from above".³³ It had according to Yurkevych, "connected the question of national liberation to all the problems of the emancipation of the proletariat", which he concluded "appears as the sole revolutionary and democratic power".³⁴

But by the time of the revolution in 1917 these ideas which formed the mainstream of the USDRP had been dislodged, now forming one part of a spectrum of opinion. This had obvious consequences and has proved a problem for historiography. An explanation of how this came about can be found in the period of reaction following the 1905 revolution, when the entire Social Democratic movement went into decline. In their reports to the conferences of the Second International the Central Committee of the USDRP described a "retrogression of the Party and its organizations", and that a growing influence of "bourgeois nationalist ideas" was causing a haemorrhaging, notably of the intelligentsia to cultural institutions and de-politicised nationalism.³⁵ The USDRP leadership challenged this trend as being in "sharp contradiction to the revolutionary tradition of our party".³⁶ While on a formal level they were successful it did not stop the corrosion hindering efforts at regenerating the Party.³⁷

With the First World War and resulting crisis of the Second International these divergences in Ukrainian Social Democracy became acute.³⁸ A majority of USDRP leaders opposed the war, a minority adopting either a pro-Russian or a pro-Austrian orientation along with the Ukrainian Social Democrats in Galicia.³⁹ Efforts to uphold principles that "really correspond to the USDRP traditions"

³² Rybalka (Yurkevych) "L'Ukraine Et La Guerre".

³³ Draper 1-33. Draper described the fundamental historical division in the socialist movement between forms of "socialism from above" conceived of a socialism handed down to the masses by an elite as opposed to being realised by the masses themselves, organised in democratic organs under their own control.

³⁴ Rybalka "L'Ukraine Et La Guerre" 22.

³⁵ This was cited in the report to the conference of the Second International, in Copenhagen at which Yurkevych attended as the USDRP delegate (see *Bericht der Ukrainischen Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiter-Partei* 5).

³⁶ The USDRP CC reported: "A central task will be to develop our national class politics opposed to the Ukrainian bourgeois national movement and opposed to these intellectuals in the party which have sympathy for this Ukrainian bourgeois national movement" (*Bericht der Ukrainischen Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiter-Partei* 13). Yurkevych was instrumental in the expulsion of Dmytro Dontsov (1883-1973) from the USDRP.

³⁷ Yurkevych bemoaned: "The Ukrainian Marxist intelligentsia has almost no interest in a workers' press. Our generation, carelessly and without perspectives of its own, has gotten involved in Ukrainian bourgeois affairs. Its path and that of the Ukrainian workers' movement have parted ways apparently forever" (Rybalka "Paki i paki" 277).

³⁸ The majority of USDRP leaders opposed the war, a minority adopted a pro-Russian or a pro-Austrian orientation and the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine was formed by Melenevskyi and the former General Secretary of the USDRP Andrii Zhuk.

³⁹ See Rosdolsky "Do istorii Soiuzu vyavolennia Ukrainy".

were led by a section of the leadership, such the Galician Levynsky, Yurkevych and Diatliv of the USDRP.⁴⁰ Under the editorship of Yurkevych the paper *Borotba* was launched in Geneva; it was a precursor of the *Nezalezhnyky*. A supporter of the anti-war Zimmerwald movement *Borotba* declared: "Above all, we should not take sides, not besmirch our revolutionary cause in showing solidarity with the war aims of any of the governments involved".⁴¹ It called for a new International where "the liberation of Ukraine will be the watchword of the Third International, and of the proletarian socialists of Europe, in their struggle against Russian imperialism".⁴²

On the eve of the revolution there were deep divergences not only within Ukrainian Social Democracy but also with the RSDRP.⁴³ The USDRP had grown closer to the Bolsheviks during 1913-1917, but on repeated occasions they could not resolve their differences on the national question.⁴⁴ In a comprehensive critique of the Russian Social Democrats, mainly Lenin's *Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Yurkevych argued that by holding to two mutually exclusive propositions, the "right of nations to self-determination" with a preference for large states and centralism, it "destroys within them the capacity to consider the national question from a genuinely internationalist point of view".⁴⁵ Asserting that "In the whole course of their activity they have never come out on Ukrainian soil against national oppression"⁴⁶ Yurkevych appealed that if they were sincere they should "at least refrain from hindering the Ukrainian proletariat in the struggle for its own national liberation".⁴⁷

These views were to resonate in the USDRP revival, though Yurkevych did not participate; he was terminally ill, and on reaching Moscow he remained there

⁴⁰ P. Diatliv, a Central Committee member of the USDRP, wrote to Levynsky defending his anti-war stance being espoused by Yurkevych: "Thus, your statement that the views of *Borotba* are the personal views of 'Mr. Rybalka' [Yurkevych] is contrary to the fact. . . . But you, comrade, as a person familiar with the programme and tactics of our party, undoubtedly know that the views of *Borotba* really correspond to the USDRP traditions" (Doroshenko 62).

⁴¹ "War or Revolution?" *Borotba* No. 4, September 1915, 3-6.

⁴² Rybalka "L'Ukraine Et La Guerre" 54.

⁴³ Yurkevych had secured broad support including in the RSDRP, his sympathisers included Leon Trotsky, Maniulsky, and the left group *Vperyod*.

⁴⁴ "Furthermore we connect with the Bolsheviks in their decisive fight against social patriotism. The endeavors of the Mensheviks to cover up the pestilence of social patriotism, which during the war was revealed in all its shocking nakedness in the whole Socialist International, only presents an echo of world opportunism—and we have to declare war on this if we want to save socialism from a new intellectual catastrophe. Whoever claims that the Bolsheviks are the tendency of 'splitters' just because they stand for the curing of the International from the infection of patriotism, has either not grasped the huge significance of the current crisis of world socialism, or are themselves infected with this patriotic disease." ("Russian Social Democracy and Us" *Borotba* No. 2, April 1915, 3).

⁴⁵ Rybalka "Russkie Sotsialdemokrat". Republished in Russian and Ukrainian, edited by Ivan Maistrenko (Munich: Sucanist, 1969). All quotations are from the English translation by Myroslav Yurkevich, "The Russian Social Democrats and the National Question". Rybalka "Russian Social Democrats" 59.

⁴⁶ Rybalka "Russian Social Democrats" 77.

⁴⁷ Rybalka "Russian Social Democrats" 78.

paralysed until his death in 1919.⁴⁸ His absence certainly contributed to the changed complexion of the USDRP which rapidly revived. Dmytro Doroshenko characterised the conflict which had surfaced in the Ukrainian movement as between "two principles: the state-national and the social-international".⁴⁹ To the revolutionary Social Democrats these were false opposites, the former dismembering an integrated class-based perspective of universal liberation.

The USDRP of February 1917 now embraced not only former members, energised youth and workers, but crucially those who had fragmented in the retrogression of the preceding years, unchanged in their outlook.⁵⁰ In this changed environment what had been the mainstream became a milieu relocated to the left wing of their Party, in the process of the revolution crystallising into the *Nezalezhnyky*.

The Fourth Congress of the USDRP (1917)

Ukrainian Marxism from its beginnings grappled with the perplexities of national liberation and its intimate connection to the emancipation of labour from both a social structure still characterised by a feudal nature and the relations of capitalism. Controversy had long raged among the Social Democrats, over which social class could attain hegemony and transcend the social cleavages, establishing a cohesive and viable system. The view of the current that cohered into the *Nezalezhnyky* was that it flowed from the class structure and composition of Ukrainian society, that as a "nation of workers and peasants" with "no nationally conscious bourgeoisie", the hegemonic role would correspond to its character, making the emancipation of labour integral to the quest for national liberation.⁵¹

A number of Ukrainian Marxists attempted to develop a totalising perspective, which reached beyond those orthodoxies predetermining a bourgeois ascendancy. This can be traced from Mykola Porsh, the founding theorist of the USDRP, who concluded in 1907 that "only the proletariat can assume the leadership in the struggle for autonomy; the Ukrainian national movement will not be a bourgeois movement of triumphant capitalism",⁵² through to the *Nezalezhnyky* theorists who were the only communists in the former Empire who explicitly espoused a perspective "aiming at permanent revolution", flowing from their conception of proletarian hegemony as a means to transcend the fragmentation fostered by capital and whose fault lines the labour movement mirrored. In 1924 the UKP complained of the dual existence of the UKP and of the KP(b)U, "a subsidiary

⁴⁸ Yurkevych had particular influence on the Retrograd and Moscow USDRP Committees who republished articles of *Borotba* in their journal *Nashe Zhyttia*.

⁴⁹ Doroshenko 37.

⁵⁰ The USDRP grew significantly in 1917; in early May the USDRP claimed it was "transforming itself into a mass workers' organisation"; by the end of 1917 it claimed 40,000 members (*Robitnycha Hazeta* 6 May 1917, cited in Bojcun "Working Class" 279).

⁵¹ Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 2 102.

⁵² Porsh, 31.

of the Party of another country (Russia)". They strove for an "appropriate organisation of the proletariat as hegemon", arguing that this contradiction would only be resolved "in the inevitable historical process of consolidation of Ukraine, as a nation, on the brink of losing its dependent colonial position, and in the constituting of the Ukrainian proletariat as the class-hegemon of its country".⁵³

This object of the Ukrainian revolution was described by Volodymyr Vynnychenko, leader of the USDRP and later of the UKP Foreign Group, as "*vsebichne vyzvolennia*" (universal liberation), of the worker and peasant masses to be realised by the "current of universal (social, national, political, moral, cultural, etc.) liberation; such a total and radical liberation is usually known under the name of revolutionary".⁵⁴ According to Vynnychenko, the "universal current" which strove to realise this historical tendency comprised the most radical of the socialist parties, the Ukrainian Communist Party (Nezalezhnyky), the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries-Borotbisty and the oppositional federalist currents among the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in Ukraine.

The first phase of the revolution spanned from the February revolution up to the October seizure of power by the Central Rada of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic (UNR).⁵⁵ Vynnychenko was then first president of the General Secretariat of the Central Rada, the autonomous government of Ukraine; he considered that the revolution seemed to be following a course concurrent with Ukraine's class composition:

Thus, it seems that it would have been logical to continue establishing only the workers' and peasants' statehood, which would have corresponded to the entire nation's character.

And it seemed to have been so planned during the first period, especially during the struggle against the Provisional Government. And our power seemed to have been established in such a way. The Central Rada really consisted of councils of peasants', soldiers' and workers' deputies, who were elected at the respective congresses and sent to the Central Rada. And the General Secretariat seemed to have been consisting only of socialists. And the leading parties, Social Democrats and Social-Revolutionists, seemed to have been standing firmly on the basis of social revolution.⁵⁶

The USDRP grew in size and influence among the Ukrainian workers during the struggle with the Provisional Government; this was "considered by Ukrainian Social Democrats to be their 'Bolshevik' period, although this 'Bolshevism' was upheld by the national struggle more than by the class struggle".⁵⁷ This leading role contained a duality; on the one hand the "Bolshevism" Richytsky describes

⁵³ Lyst TsK Vikonomy Kominternu Pro Vzayemovidnostini Mizh UKP i KP(b)U, 27 August 1924 (Bachinskyi 524-5).

⁵⁴ V. Vynnychenko, *Rozlad i pohodzhennia* (cited in Rudnytsky 419).

⁵⁵ It is worth recording that the USDRP played a pivotal role in the February Revolution in Petrograd.

⁵⁶ Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 1 102.

⁵⁷ Richytsky "Memorandum" 45-66.

and on the other according to Vynnychenko "all subsequent errors, were imposed on the Social Democratic movement".⁵⁸ Underlying these errors were fundamental differences over conceptions of the revolution and requisite strategy. On the burning questions: the war, agrarian revolution and workers' self-management, the leaders of the Central Rada prevaricated and at key moments lagged behind the pace of the movement from below, even on the national question with which it was preoccupied.⁵⁹ Relations strained within the Central Rada, between its leading circles drawn largely from the intelligentsia and the middle class, and the rank and file of the movement.⁶⁰

The prevailing opinion was that the recognition of autonomy was a precondition of progress; the All-Ukrainian conference of the USDRP held on 4-5 April 1917, in Kyiv considered it "as the very first and urgent present objective of the Ukrainian proletariat and the entire country".⁶¹ This corresponded with the orthodox Marxist dualist view that while a social revolution could be achieved in the West, only after the Russian Empire had passed into the phase of advanced capitalism and parliamentary democracy would the requisite conditions become available. These problems were analysed in Vynnychenko's history of the revolution; while outlining the leading role of the USDRP in the revolution he complained:

But socialism of the enslaved is not the socialism meant by those "socialists" who have put on a mask in order to obtain the masses' trust. And it is not the socialism meant by the Ukrainian democracy, including our "Marxist" Social Democrats. We, the Ukrainian Social Democrats, have emasculated Marxism. We have cut out its vivid, constructive and active part, having become sterile, inert and fat boars.⁶²

Vynnychenko considered they had taken Marx's theory of the development of capitalism in an ideal context, "the Bolsheviks, they say, by starting to establish socialism in underdeveloped Russia, were neither true Marxists or socialists, but deleterious Utopians, Blanquists, anarchists and almost reactionaries"; instead these

⁵⁸ Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 1 251-2.

⁵⁹ Porsh complained that: "At first the Central Rada was a bloc of parties united around the slogan of autonomy and federation. When our party entered the Rada, it replaced its class orientation with a national one. Some of our comrades said quite plainly that until we achieve the goal of unity there can be no class struggle in the Central Rada... As far as I am concerned, Ukrainian Social Democrats had no right compromising on class interests in deference to general, national ones" (*Robitnycha Hazeta* 4 October 1917). According to Vynnychenko this was not simply due to their sociology, or opportunism but that they acted as "democrats, republicans and national revolutionists rather than socialists" (Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 2 89-90).

⁶⁰ Raya Dunayevskaya identified a similar problem in the anti-colonial revolutions after 1945: "The greatest obstacle to the further development of these national liberation movements comes from the intellectual bureaucracy which has emerged to 'lead' them. In the same manner the greatest obstacle in the way of the working class overcoming capitalism comes from the Labor bureaucracy that leads it" (Dunayevskaya 15).

⁶¹ *Robitnycha Hazeta* 7 April 1917.

⁶² Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 2 91.

Ukrainian Social Democrats disregarded the fact that Marx greeted heartily the French Bolsheviks in 1871, the French Communards, who also intended to establish socialism in underdeveloped rural France, that Marx himself studied the experience of those "Utopians" and taught other people and that this doctrine certainly did not differ from his doctrine on the development of capitalism in general. It was more wholesome for their mentality and their objectives to think, believe and say that neither Russia nor Ukraine were developed enough for socialism, and therefore this development should not be disturbed, should not be interrupted with some "untimely experiments".⁶³

These opinions were strongly challenged, on the one hand by the movement from below and on the other hand undermined from above by the antagonism towards Ukraine by the liberal and conservative wings of Russia. Even before Lenin's April Theses, the opinion was being voiced within the USDRP that the revolution needed to become a social revolution. Symptomatic was *Nashe Zhyttya*: "We are not just democrats; we are Social-Democrats, socialists... the Great Socialist Society. That is our final aim. The Constituent Assembly, the democratic republic is but a means, a stage to this end. We must not stand still."⁶⁴ The left's influence was most evident at the USDRP's Fourth Congress in September 1917, which declared:

The present Russian revolution, bringing in its wake a transformation in socio-economic relations unheard of in the history of all previous revolutions, finding a broad echo in the great worker masses of Western Europe, awakening in them an impulse to abandon the path of capitalism, to make a social revolution and, at the same time, to stop the imperialist war, which may bring about an uprising of the proletariat in Western Europe—this revolution is a prologue to and beginning of the universal socialist revolution.⁶⁵

The Central Rada was condemned for "inclining at every turn toward petty bourgeois nationalism", with demands that its General Secretariat "must be grounded in the organised revolutionary democracy of Ukraine and do its will instead".⁶⁶

⁶³ Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 2 183.

⁶⁴ *Nashe Zhyttya* [Our Life] 24 March 1917. That Ukrainian Social Democrats were outlining this perspective in late March is of historical importance; very few projected these ideas until the return of Lenin with his April Theses. When he presented it he was virtually isolated within the [Rossiyskaya Sotsial-demokraticheskaya Rabochaya Partiya-Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (Bolsheviks) RSDRP(b)]. Ironically among the first people he took his opinions to were the soldiers of the USDRP influenced Izmailovsky Regiment on 10 April.

⁶⁵ The principle resolutions adopted by the Fourth Congress of the USDRP was drafted by Mykola Porsh, the congress itself was influenced not only by the traditional left leaders but the new generation of militants such as Neronovych and Richylsky. The report and resolutions of the congress were published in *Robitnycha Hazeta* - Organ of the Bureau of the Central Committee and Kyiv Committee of the USDRP. 1, 3, 5 and 7 October 1917.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* *Robitnycha Hazeta* 1, 5 and 7 October 1917.

The Fifth Congress of the USDRP (1917-1918)

The October revolution brought all the contradictions to a head, revealing sharply the salient features of the revolution in Ukraine: the division between the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian sections of the working class, the estrangement of the peasantry from the urban workers and the fragmenting of the social and national dimensions.⁶⁷

These cleavages found their resolution encapsulated in the idea of an independent Ukraine based upon the organs of workers' and peasants' self-government—the *soviets*. A possible rapprochement between the divergent elements which could realise this idea emerged in two quarters, first with a growth in support in the USDRP and the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (UPSR) for the revolutionary socialist regeneration of the Central Rada.⁶⁸ Secondly there was a surge of support in the soviets recognising the Central Rada and seeking its re-election on a wider constituency.⁶⁹ But these forces did not combine and the rapprochement necessary for its realisation was retarded. The Bolsheviks, who had no territorial organisation in Ukraine, were not unified around such a perspective from *within* the UNR.⁷⁰ The approach of their leadership in Russia was tactless, taking no account of the Ukrainian peculiarities and attempting to superimpose the Russian model.⁷¹ The result compounded the divisions, hindering those wishing to give the emerging social transformation a Ukrainian character and form.

The internal fragmentation produced two rival bodies claiming to be the government of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic. First, the General Secretariat of the Central Rada in Kyiv, from which the USDRP withdrew after the UNR declared independence, leaving it to the right wing of the UPSR.⁷²

⁶⁷ These problems of the revolution were highlighted in the writings of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks Serhii Mazlakh and Vasyl Shakhrai in *Do khvyli, Saratov, 1919* (Mazlakh and Shakhrai). This became a key text of the pro-autonomy/independence currents of Ukrainian communism during the revolutionary years.

⁶⁸ The Third Congress of the UPSR stated that: "the national side of the revolution begins to threaten the further successful development of the socio-economic class struggle" warning that the Central Rada could lose the support of the peasants and workers in Ukraine which will also threaten the national gains of the revolution (Khrystiuk, 65).

⁶⁹ In seven out of ten of Ukraine's largest cities the councils of workers' and soldiers' deputies supported the Central Rada as the legitimate governing organ. Evidence suggests the majority of the approximately 320 urban councils were ready to build an independent Ukraine, evidencing a clear evolution in working class opinions on the national question. This support for re-election was particularly strong in towns in the northern gubernyas and in Kyiv, Kremenchuk, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Kherson, Katerynoslav, Odessa and Mykolaiv soviets. See Hamretsky.

⁷⁰ In their campaign for the re-election of the Rada through a congress of soviets, the Bolsheviks did not seek unity with like-minded Ukrainian socialists, nor secure support from the soviets that had already backed such a congress. Instead it was called by the RSDRP Kyiv Committee. See Prymak.

⁷¹ An exception to this was the Poltava Committee of the RSDRP (Bolsheviks) who were engaged in negotiations with the USDRP and sought a revolutionary socialist regroupment in Ukraine.

⁷² The USDRP predicted the worst of the right wing UPSR: "the revolutionary situation is marked now by a transition to the stage of anarchy, after which it will pass to reaction and entirely other elements that are far from the proletariat will stand at the helm of the state. At this moment our party cannot be responsible for the devious policy of the SRs" (*Robitnycha Hazeta* 16 January 1918).

This was challenged by the Kharkiv-based Peoples Secretariat of the Central Executive Committee of the All-Ukrainian Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies.⁷³ It was one of the first governments in the world with women among its leading figures—Evheniya Bosch, the Peoples Secretary of Internal Affairs.⁷⁴ It was not a solely Bolshevik affair; the Peoples Secretariat was headed by Yukhym Medvedyev, part of the Ukrainian Social-Democrats (US-D) (Left) a pro-soviet, left split from the USDRP in 1917.

The first Soviet government is often portrayed as a purely Russian invention, downplaying its Ukrainian characteristics and seeing the events of 1917 as a purely Russian invasion. The role of the US-D(Left) such as in the famous Arsenal uprising in Kyiv on 29 January 1918 was downplayed by Soviet and national historiography.⁷⁵ The UKP challenged this, recognising that the first Soviet government tried to “advance the proletarian revolution from within” (Bachynskyi, 534). If “opportunistic elements” had sabotaged the Central Rada then it was the Russian and Russified urban proletariat along with the Bolsheviks which “were unprepared for this policy” (Ibid.) that undermined the People's Secretariat.⁷⁶

⁷³ Those delegates disaffected by the events in Kyiv walked out and made their way to the rival Congress of Soviets of the Donbas, Kryvyi Rih area being held in Kharkiv on 9 December 1917. Subsequent Soviet historiography would recognise this event as the First All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets. Though mainly consisting of RSDRP(b) and Russian Left-SRs; it also included UPSR and USDRP delegates. A split took place in the USDRP based on a tendency known as the USDRP(Left), headed by Medvedev and Neronovych. See Butsenko (121-2).

⁷⁴ Evheniya Bosch was born in 1879 in Kherson province; in 1901 she joined RSDRP and became a Bolshevik. Heading their Kyiv committee, she was politically close to the left-wing of the RSDRP and sided with Pyatakov and Bukharin against Lenin on the national question. She resigned her post in protest at the Brest-Litovsk Peace. She suffered from illnesses, which forced her to suicide in late 1924. Her books include: *Natsionalnoye pravitelstvo I sovetskaya vlast na ukraina* [The National Government and Soviet Power in Ukraine] (1919) and *God borby, Borba za vlast na Ukraini saprelya 1917 g do netskoi okkupatsii* [Years of Struggle: The Fight for Power in Ukraine from April 1917 to German Occupation] (1925; republished in 1990).

⁷⁵ Sakhray [V. Skorovstansky] a former USDRP organiser and minister wrote: “When open, armed struggle with the Central Rada began, Bolsheviks from all parts of Ukraine... were of one mind in proposing that a Soviet centre should be established in Ukraine as a counterweight to the Central Rada, and not one responsible member of this party ventured to protest against the promulgation and creation of the Ukrainian People's Republic. On the contrary, in complete agreement with the programmatic demand of the right of every nation to self-determination, they openly or at least tacitly stood on its [the Republic's] ground. The will of the Ukrainian nation emerged, the Ukrainian people separated into a Republic in federative union with other parts of Russia. Well and good! We in this Republic will wage a war not against the Ukrainian People's Republic, not against the Ukrainian people, not in order to strangle it. No! This will be a struggle for power within the Ukrainian People's Republic—this will be a class struggle...” (Skorovstansky 110-11).

⁷⁶ There was a retreat from the Kharkiv Congress of Soviets' decisions with an array of splinter Soviet republics. Real power was revealed to be not the soviet government but the military forces of Soviet Russia. Shakhrai, a minister, complained: “What kind of Ukrainian government is this when its members do not know and do not want to know the Ukrainian language? They have no influence in Ukrainian society. No-one has even heard their names before. What kind of ‘Ukrainian Minister of the Army’ am I when all of the Ukrainised divisions in Kharkiv will not obey me and defend Soviet power and I am compelled to disarm them? The only military support we have in our struggle against the Central Rada is the army Antonov brought into Ukraine from Russia, an army moreover that looks at everything Ukrainian as hostile and counterrevolutionary” (cited in Bojcun “Working Class” 327).

The involvement of Soviet Russia and the Central Powers in Ukraine deepened the malaise; through the substitution of internal elements by external forces, the revolution consumed itself. Lured by the appeal of the Germans the Central Rada entered a union with them at Brest Litovsk on 9 February (27 January) 1918. The Germans then deposed both UNR governments; first the Peoples Secretariat, then the General Secretariat as unreliable "left opportunists".⁷⁷ Vynnychenko thought the conservative coup d'état of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi "only completed and crystallised in a precise form that which existed during the time of the Central Rada"; on its return to Kyiv its revolutionary essence was dissipated.⁷⁸

The new regime of comprador capitalists and landlords proved to be a defining moment, sharpening the process of differentiation in the Ukrainian revolution. This was already apparent at the Fifth Congress of the USDRP held secretly in Kyiv on 10 May 1918. On the national question the Congress broke decisively with the party's recent autonomist-federalist position in favour of the independence of Ukraine, and though the left wing was demoralised by recent events including the policy of the Russian Bolsheviks, it was not without influence. The main resolution stated:

As the Ukrainian revolution developed it called for the political independence of Ukraine and radical social reforms, which took the revolution beyond the limits of a national revolution and made the resolution of its tasks dependent upon international factors...

The ultimate resolution of the tasks of the Ukrainian revolution is connected with the growth of the revolutionary proletarian movement in the west.⁷⁹

Creation of the Nezalezhnyky and the Sixth Congress of the USDRP (1918-1919)

The Austro-German occupation effectively cut Ukraine off from events in the rest of the former Russian Empire. It was sheltered from the excesses of "War Communism", while in the eyes of many workers and peasants the brutality of the occupying armies discredited both the Central Rada, and its successor Ukrainian State, as representatives of the national idea. In contrast the

⁷⁷ On 9 March 1918 Colonel von Stolzenberg told his High Command: "It is very doubtful whether this government, composed as it is exclusively of left opportunists, will be able to establish a firm authority" (Fedyshyn 96).

⁷⁸ Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 3 24.

⁷⁹ Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materialy*, Tom III p.18.

idea of the direct democracy of the soviets was preserved and took on a new lease of life.⁸⁰

The primary organisational initiative to reconstitute the Ukrainian Peoples Republic in November 1918 came from a coalition headed by the Directory of the UNR, led by two opposing figures—Petlyura and Vynnychenko.⁸¹ The “November Ukrainian Revolution” was conducted “exclusively by the indigenous national-revolutionary forces of the Ukrainian people” (Bachynskyi, 534) and from the start it was clear the subjective forces were radically to the left of the Directory. The “Sovietophile” majority of the USDRP, the Borotbisty, already declared their opposition and large sections of the army—the red militias—supported soviet power. With the hoped-for socialist resurgence underway in Europe, the pro-communist left of the USDRP organised into a faction, the Organising Committee of the USDRP *Nezalezhnyky*, established in early December 1918.⁸²

They made their first challenge at the State Conference convened by the Directory in Vynnytsia on 12-14 December where Avdiyenko argued it was necessary:

1: to recognize that a profoundly socio-economic, as well as political, revolution is taking place in Ukraine; 2. to recognize that its engine is the proletariat and the toiling peasantry, and 3. in accordance with this, to declare the principle of the dictatorship of the toiling masses in the form of councils of workers’ and peasants’ deputies.⁸³

By moderate and conservative leaders of the UNR, they were viewed with increasing suspicion.⁸⁴ The *Nezalezhnyky* also differentiated themselves from the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine (KP(b)U). Considering that it was not genuinely Ukrainian but a subordinate of the RKP(B), they took issue with the

⁸⁰ There was also a shift in working class opinion on the national question, with significant support for an independent Ukraine. This was confirmed by the Second All-Ukrainian Workers Congress on 13 May 1918; despite a non-Ukrainian majority it agreed to a united struggle with the peasantry for an independent Ukrainian Peoples Republic, sentiments further expressed at the All-Ukrainian Conference of Trade Unions, again largely non-Ukrainian in composition (Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materialy*, Tom III p.18; Bojczun “Working Class” 373).

⁸¹ The Directory members were: Vynnychenko, as Chairman, Petliura, F. Shevets of the Peasant Union, P. Andriievsky, Independent Socialists, and A. Makarenko representing the rail workers trade union.

⁸² The *Nezalezhnyky* counted a number of prominent figures in its ranks: Mykhaylo Tkachenko, their main theorist, had been Minister of Internal Affairs of the Central Rada; Volodymyr Chekhivsky, the Head of the Council of Ministers of the revived UNR government. The other leading theorist was Andriy Richytsky; he was one of the editors of the USDRP central organ *Robitnycha Gazeta* in 1917. Mykhaylo Avdiyenko was the most active practical figure, originally from the strong Petrograd USDRP organisation where he was soldier; later in Kyiv he was close to Vynnychenko. Another prominent member was Antin Drahomyretsky, a Kyiv functionary and Yurko Mazurenko; he was in command of the USDRP Revolutionary Committee and in 1917 played a key role in blocking the passage to Petrograd of Kornilov.

⁸³ Khrystiuk Vol. IV Chapter III 52.

⁸⁴ When the Dniprovsk Division entered Kyiv on the defeat of Skoropadsky it was under red banners and slogans of “All power to the Soviets!” and “All land to the peasants”. Fearing they would make an attempt to take power, Petlyura transferred them from the city (Petrichenko).

Bolsheviks' view of the workers' and peasants' councils and the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat:

It is a party that aims not for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the revolutionary peasantry, but for the dictatorship of a section of the proletariat and of its own party. It is, therefore, profoundly violent and it will replace proletarian dictatorial violence against the bourgeois order with the violence of a small group.⁸⁵

It had proven itself "a hypocritical party which continually violates its own principles" and in view of this "cannot be trusted until it is transformed organisationally and merges with the interests of the Ukrainian toiling people".⁸⁶ These criticisms by the *Nezalezhnyky* in 1918 anticipated similar points made by Herman Gorter and Anton Pannekoek of the KAPD in Germany and the communist oppositions in the RKP(B) in the 1920s.⁸⁷

The revival of the UNR was accompanied by an extreme retrogressionist trend, the conservative elements engaged in pogroms and indiscriminate repression of the labour and peasant movement.⁸⁸ The middle class and moderate elements, though favouring a parliamentary democracy, found themselves political prisoners of this element on whom they were reliant.⁸⁹ The two conceptions, workers' councils versus Parliament, were debated at the Sixth Congress of the USDRP, 10-12 January 1919.

Richytsky moved the *Nezalezhnyky* theses; the task it was stated was "the transformation of the sovereign and independent Ukrainian People's Republic into the sovereign and independent Ukrainian Socialist Republic".⁹⁰ Power would be organised on the "principle of the dictatorship of the urban and rural proletariat and the poorer toiling peasantry, organised in worker-peasant councils".⁹¹ On the

⁸⁵ Ukrainian People's Socialist Republic December 1918 (*Robitnycha Hazeta*, 7 January 1919, Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materiialy*, Tom. IV, pp. 55-56).

⁸⁶ Ukrainian People's Socialist Republic December 1918 (*Robitnycha Hazeta*, 7 January 1919, Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materiialy*, Tom. IV, pp. 55-56).

⁸⁷ The KAPD was the dissident Communist Workers Party of Germany. Pannekoek made this point about the dictatorship of the communist party in "Der neue Balnquisismus".

⁸⁸ An illustration was Colonel Bolbochan, the former Hetmanate commander of the Zaporozhian Division, who was appointed the Directory's commander in chief in Left-Bank Ukraine. Bolbochan instituted a reign of terror against the resurgence of the agrarian revolution and the workers' councils (Baker "Peasants, Power and Revolution in the Village" 167-8).

⁸⁹ Assessing what had arisen in the UNR, "Andr. Mykh" of the *Nezalezhnyky* wrote: "Whatever was alive and popular in it has passed to the masses where it works. But remnants of the nationalist bourgeoisie and intelligentsia cling to the blue and yellow banner, arrange buffoonery, meetings to the sound of church bells, prayer services and other attributes of national sentimentalism, which only serve to discredit the popular movement and its leaders. Our task and the task of the Directory at the present moment is to break completely with remnants of the national front" (*Robitnycha Hazeta*, December 1918, pp. 55-56).

⁹⁰ Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materiialy*, Tom IV, p.69.

⁹¹ Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materiialy*, Tom IV, p.69.

international question, while defending the independence of Ukraine the Nezalezhnyky demanded:

a) a rapprochement with the Russian Soviet Republic, on the basis of mutual recognition of the sovereignty of both socialist republics, complete and mutual non-interference in the internal affairs of the neighbouring republic, the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of Ukraine (including the Crimea), their non-interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine and, in the case of refusal, an active defence of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic against imperialist attack.⁹²

A majority of the Central Committee spoke in favour; the opposition was a combination of the centrists and the right wing "Katerynoslav group" of Issak Mazepa, Panas Fadenko and Ivan Romanchenko, joined surprisingly by Mykola Porsh.⁹³ It is debatable how representative the conference was in a situation where members of the Central Committee couldn't sleep in their own beds for fear of arrest.⁹⁴ After their resolution was defeated, the Nezalezhnyky walked out and launched *Chervony Prapor* [Red Banner] on 22 January.⁹⁵ It included a Declaration written by Tkachenko and Richytsky stating it was now time to move from a "passive waiting state to an active and creative struggle for the reconstruction of the whole socio-political and economic order of Ukraine". At the Sixth Congress the question was sharply posed "either the old or the new—and the official party stood between them".⁹⁶ Responding to the fear of the dominance of the "non-Ukrainian urban element" they pointed out that the "proletariat was not entirely foreign" and emphasised that in "Ukraine can and must come to power together with the revolutionary peasantry".⁹⁷ In the course of the revolution the non-Ukrainian workers would be drawn more and more into all forms of internal life in Ukraine and "rid themselves of the remnants of old Russia and will join the Ukrainian people and proletariat". (Deklaratsiya Fraktsii Nazalezhnykh USDRP, *Chervony Prapor*, 22 January 1919)

Khrystiuk considers the Nezalezhnyky were bound for too long a time to the Directory.⁹⁸ In practice their approach during the period December 1918 to January 1920 involved a combination of tactics of reform and revolution. The

⁹² Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materiialy*, Tom IV, p.69.

⁹³ The discussions that Porsh held with Mazepa on their own do not explain such a volte-face by Porsh. One can only surmise that the experience of the Bolshevik rule in Ukraine had seriously disillusioned Porsh, as it had others. It was his last speech to a USDRP audience in Ukraine after which he was dispatched as UNR ambassador to Germany. In January 1921 he began to adopt a more sovietophile politics; he made a speech at a student meeting calling on the émigrés to recognise the Soviet Ukrainian government and return to the Ukraine. Porsh applied to return to the Ukraine himself in 1922 and in January 1923 the Ukrainian Politburo decided to allow him to return though he never took up the offer. He started to drift away from political activity and suffered a tragic death in Germany in 1944.

⁹⁴ Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 3 242.

⁹⁵ *Chervony Prapor* 22 January 1919.

⁹⁶ *Chervony Prapor* 22 January 1919.

⁹⁷ *Chervony Prapor* 22 January 1919.

⁹⁸ Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materiialy*, Tom IV p.13.

Nezalezhnyky did not possess sufficient strength to overthrow the Directory on their own, nor was it necessarily desirable from the standpoint of their pluralist objective of a "provisional worker-peasant government composed of representatives of parties and groups that stand for the power of the soviets".⁹⁹ In an attempt to establish a more unified approach a meeting of the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian socialists was held in the middle of January attended by the Nezalezhnyky, the Bund, the United Jewish Socialist Workers Party and the Menshevik Internationalists.¹⁰⁰ The meeting produced no concrete results beyond resolving to maintain in contact "in order to defend the worker-peasant revolution in Ukraine, to mollify the national struggle and to correct the political line and the tactical errors of the Russian Bolsheviks in Ukraine".¹⁰¹

The Nezalezhnyky also attempted to utilise their posts within the UNR to broker peace with Soviet Russia.¹⁰² Yurko Mazurenko headed a diplomatic mission to Moscow on 15 January 1919:

I declared that I would go on the condition that decrees on the transfer of local power to the Soviets and a call for a congress of Soviets (and not a Labour Congress) to be published immediately, as well as on the condition that the communist party would be legalised. For this, of course, I was ostracised by the Directorate.¹⁰³

The left claimed the mission was sabotaged by the right wing of the UNR securing a declaration of war on Soviet Russia on 16 January 1919.¹⁰⁴ By this time Chekhivsky and Vynnychenko had resigned from the government over its pro-Entente turn.¹⁰⁵ The Nezalezhnyky turned to the establishment of soviet power by force through the red militias.¹⁰⁶ Its main centre of strength was in the Kyiv region; at a congress in Hryhoriv the Dniprovsk Division renamed itself the First Kyiv Soviet Division and elected Danylo Zeleny as otaman (commander) along with a Revolutionary Committee joined by the Nezalezhnyky.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ *Chervony Prapor* 22 January 1919.

¹⁰⁰ Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materiialy*, Tom IV, pp. 49-54.

¹⁰¹ Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materiialy*, Tom IV 12.

¹⁰² There is speculation that it was without Lenin's knowledge that the Red Army advanced into Ukraine in late December 1918 (Adams 82-5).

¹⁰³ Mazurenko *Dokymenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukraini* 248-53.

¹⁰⁴ An act complemented by Red Army commander Antonov also lobbying Moscow against an agreement stating there was "nobody in Ukraine with whom we should negotiate" (Stachiw 258).

¹⁰⁵ Mazurenko's efforts are considered to have been sabotaged by the new head of the Directory of the UNRS. (Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 3 279-80).

¹⁰⁶ Most successfully in Left-Bank Ukraine in Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Katerynoslav guberniya the Directory was overthrown. On the Right Bank attempted risings occurred in Volhynia, Zhytomyr and in the Obruch district where the Otamanshchyna responded with pogroms. In Vynnychenko's estimation in the territory under their control: "There was neither punishment, nor justice, nor trials, nor control over these criminals and enemies of the revolution and the national movement. The whole system of military authority was constructed and consciously based, by the chief otamany, on the principle that there would be no control" (Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 3 188).

¹⁰⁷ Petrichenko.

The Ukrainian Socialist Councils Republic (1919)

On 4 February 1919 the Directory of the UNR withdrew from Kyiv in the face of the advancing soviet forces, *Chervony Prapor* concluding “the Directory’s positive role was finished”.¹⁰⁸ Yurii Lapchynsky wrote that in 1919 the “communist movement and Soviet power in Ukraine were built in a political situation, which was totally different to the first period”.¹⁰⁹ Peasant brigades defected *en masse* to parties adhering to a soviet platform; the situation could not have been more favourable for a convergence between the Ukrainian and the Russian revolutions and the creation of a republic based on the councils with a plurality of pro-soviet parties was more viable than at any other time. The Red Army entered Kyiv on 5 February 1919 unopposed, welcomed by an announcement of the Executive of the Kyiv Soviet signed by the Nezalezhnyky, Bolsheviks and Borotbisty deputies stating “the Directory has been driven from Kyiv and red Soviet battalions under the leadership of the Worker-Peasant Government of Ukraine are entering the city”.¹¹⁰ But the Nezalezhnyky had not abandoned their earlier criticism:

If the Directory stupidly repeated an outdated policy that has already been condemned by history, then the Russian Bolsheviks have come by the same outdated path... Under the slogan of the struggle for the power of the soviets arrives a government that calls itself Ukrainian, but which we do not and cannot describe as such.¹¹¹

The KP(b)U by its own volition had established in Russia a “Provisional Worker-Peasant Government of Ukraine”.¹¹² Formed separately from the revolutionary process, it was initially led by Georgy Pyatakov, former head of the Kyiv RSDRP. In 1918 he was a leader of the “left communists” in Ukraine and an opponent of Lenin on the national question—for Pyatakov the revolution was more peasant than national, but sensitive to local reality he saw independence as essential to ensure its development into a workers’ revolution.¹¹³ Pyatakov was replaced in January 1919 by Christian Rakovsky.¹¹⁴ But, despite their opposition to the

¹⁰⁸ *Chervony Prapor* 6 February 1919.

¹⁰⁹ *Chervony Prapor* Kharkiv 11 July 1920.

¹¹⁰ The announcement was signed by the head of the committee Bubnov and the following members: P. Syrodenko, P. Dehtiarenko, M. Maior, V. Cherniavsky, H. Volkov, H. Myhailychenko, P. Liubchenko, I. Kachura, A. Chekhsis, I. Frenkel, and M. Avdiienko (Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materialy*, Tom IV, p.81).

¹¹¹ *Chervony Prapor* 6 February 1919.

¹¹² Adams 25-64.

¹¹³ Pyatakov’s best-known work on the national question is “The Proletariat and the ‘Right of Nations of self-determination’ in the Era of Finance Capital”, written under the name of “P. Kievsky” published in 1916 with Lenin’s reply “A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism”.

¹¹⁴ Key texts are Rakovsky (ed. Fagan) and Broué. Neither of them actually engages critically with the policy of Rakovsky in Ukraine in 1919.

Rakovsky government, the Nezalezhnyky did not reject cooperation. Their Organising Committee stated they were willing:

To enter the government and to take full responsibility for it only if: 1. All official organs of the supreme government—not only Ukrainian, but also Russian—recognize the independence and autonomy of the Ukrainian Socialist republic; 2. If a firm national and social course is taken in Ukraine, and Ukrainian is the only official language.¹¹⁵

Rakovsky had declared himself a specialist on the Ukrainian question: in *Izvestiia*, he announced the ethnic differences between Ukrainian and Russians as insignificant, that the Ukrainian peasantry lacked national consciousness and that the proletariat was purely Russian in origin.¹¹⁶ Rakovsky concluded that the Ukrainian national movement was an invention of the intelligentsia. Based on such principles what followed was a disaster. Tkachenko reported that while the KP(b)U government was establishing itself:

All sorts of Russian nationalist elements from the Black Hundreds to the revolutionary intelligentsia in Ukraine were joining forces with the Bolsheviks to help reconstruct a “united and indivisible Russia” . . . Unreliable elements signed up with the Bolshevik party and contributed to enhancing the nationalistic and even chauvinist coloration of the Bolshevik proletarian movement . . . Even the Russian communist press was writing enthusiastically about the unification of Russia and this milieu of “specialists” as well as the nationalism of the Russian communists themselves deepened the split within the proletariat along national lines . . . promoting its in its midst a fierce struggle out of which the reaction raised its head.¹¹⁷

The Nezalezhnyky viewed these developments with growing frustration: “the kind of insane and disgraceful Russification sweeping Ukraine right now has never been seen before even during the Hetmanate rule in its last ‘federative’ phase”:

Not one pamphlet in Ukrainian for the Ukrainian peasant, not one brochure, not one newspaper of the soviet government in Ukrainian! The Ukrainian language has been driven out from wherever it was. A whole series of orders on using the “generally understood language” is a sign of the times. And to the modest demands of the Ukrainian citizen that at least his national and cultural rights, like those of the “fraternal” people here in Ukraine, be safeguarded, there is but one reply: chauvinism and the spirit of the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolution.¹¹⁸

Chervony Prapor charged that behind “their cosmopolitanism lies nothing other than a not very hidden Russification in continuity with Tsarist practices”.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ *Chervony Prapor* 6 February 1919.

¹¹⁶ Mazlakh and Shakhrai 1115-17.

¹¹⁷ Tkachenko, *Borotba* Vienna No. 7-8 April 1920, p.3.

¹¹⁸ *Chervony Prapor* 9 March 1919.

¹¹⁹ *Chervony Prapor* 15 February 1919.

The promise of the “rebirth of soviet power locally” was broken, the republic ruled through appointed revolutionary committees, *revkomy*, and committees of poor peasants, *kombedy*.¹²⁰ Soviet power did not exist.¹²¹ In April the Ukrainian trade union movement was purged, subordinated to the state and absorbed into All-Russian structures.¹²² This dangerous alienation was compounded by the retarding of the agrarian revolution through excesses of grain requisitioning, “in actuality the Ukraine was plundered randomly, like a vast treasure chest for food and fuel”, exacerbated by an elitist policy of the “commune”, not formed by the self-activity of the peasants but imposed from above.¹²³ In late February *Chervony Prapor* warned that these policies were starting to produce powerful centrifugal forces and that proper transparent trade agreements with Soviet Russia were needed; “this is possible only if Ukraine is sovereign not in words but in reality, only if the workers themselves are masters in their own socialist republic and not foreign pretenders”.¹²⁴

The Nezalezhnyky responded to this crisis arguing it was “necessary to quickly devise a communist programme and organise a Ukrainian Communist Party” and in this endeavour they were engaged in discussions with a number of Bolsheviks and looked to found the UKP at a congress on 30 March 1919.¹²⁵ This turn coincided with the founding of the Communist International, at which the KP(b)U leader Mykola Skrypnyk gave an upbeat report on the Nezalezhnyky: “Although these Independent Socialists differ from the Communists on fundamentals, they are nevertheless working harmoniously with our party today and participate in the soviets”.¹²⁶ On the ground an opposite direction was taken, the Third Congress of the KP(b)U underway in Kharkiv voted by 101 to 96 against cooperation with other pro-soviet parties considering “agreements with such parties as the Right SR’s, Independent Ukrainian Social Democrats and others are admissible”.¹²⁷ These parties were to be denied “any responsible posts in the soviets” and excluded from the government of Ukraine, “which should consist solely of the representatives of the Communist Party of Ukraine”.¹²⁸

¹²⁰ Adams 125.

¹²¹ Workers’ councils existed only in the large towns, in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Katerynoslav, Poltava, Chernihiv, and then only in an advisory capacity.

¹²² There were major debates between Nezalezhnyky and supporters of “statisation” in the congresses of the chemical workers union, trade and industrial office workers, the tobacco workers, the metal workers, printers, the miners union, sugar refinery workers and the All-Ukrainian Teachers Union (Bojzun “Working Class” 446-9).

¹²³ Remington 167.

¹²⁴ *Chervony Prapor* 28 February 1919.

¹²⁵ Mazurenko 248-53.

¹²⁶ Riddell *Founding the Communist International* 98.

¹²⁷ KP(b)U Third Congress was held 1-6 March 1919; Adams 218-19.

¹²⁸ Maistrenko *Borotbism* 124-5.

This approach undermined the previous promise to “hand over power in the country” to the soviets.¹²⁹ When the Third All-Ukrainian Congress of Workers’ Peasants’ and Red Army Deputies was held on 6-10 March, the majority of delegates were from *revkomy* not soviets. The new Constitution of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was not implemented; furthermore Ukraine remained, and was considered by the government, a regional unit of Russia.¹³⁰ While some Borotbisty were “elected” to the Central Executive Committee, this was said by the Nezalezhnyky to be “only in order to show a bit of Ukrainian colour” in what was branded the “commissar state”.¹³¹

In the spring of 1919, the government waged a bitter struggle against the Nezalezhnyky; they were “deluged on all sides with accusation of nationalist chauvinism, of being counter-revolutionary and petty-bourgeois”.¹³² On the night of 25 March, Richytsky, Mazurenko and other leaders were arrested by the Cheka and *Chervony Prapor* was temporarily closed down.¹³³ The planned congress to launch a Ukrainian Communist Party was thus sabotaged.¹³⁴ When they were finally released and *Chervony Prapor* reappeared, an article by Kachinivsky summarised:

It is now two months since the soviet authorities occupied Kyiv, but we have yet to see real soviet power or the dictatorship of the proletariat. All we have is the dictatorship of the communist party.¹³⁵

Ukrainian Marxists and Soviet Hungary (1919)

The policies of the Rakovsky regime began to produce powerful centrifugal forces; engulfed by worker and peasant unrest, Soviet Ukraine started to disintegrate into internecine conflict. This crisis became acute just as the communist revolution in Europe unfolded; the Ukrainian question became integral to deciding the fate of the new soviet republics, for it was from here

¹²⁹ Manifest Vremennogo Raboche Krestianskogo Pravitel'stva Ukrainy, 1 December 1918 (cited in Mazlakh and Shakhrai 27).

¹³⁰ According to Balabanoff, first Secretary of the Communist International and a friend of Rakovsky's sent to assist him in Kyiv, “the Bolsheviks had set up an independent republic in the Ukraine. In actuality that section of it in which Soviet rule was established was completely dominated by the Moscow regime” (Balabanoff 234).

¹³¹ Khrystiuk IV.

¹³² “The Ukrainian Nezalezhnyky do not recognise the government; the Ukrainian Nezalezhnyky incite the workers and peasants against the government; the Ukrainian Nezalezhnyky agitate against helping starving Soviet Russia with grain from Ukraine; the Ukrainian Nezalezhnyky inflame national hatred; the Ukrainian Nezalezhnyky insist on drawing the rural proletariat into revolutionary construction and oppose the proletariat” (Khrystiuk IV).

¹³³ *Chervony Prapor* 3 April 1919.

¹³⁴ Mazurenko 248-53.

¹³⁵ *Chervony Prapor* 3 April 1919.

that any direct aid could be provided by Soviet Russia.¹³⁶ The new government of the Hungarian Republic of Councils proved to be friendly towards the Ukrainians' cause. A Ukrainian diplomatic mission headed by the old Social Democrat Mykola Halahan was in Budapest, and a Ukrainian communist group was also organised publishing a weekly *Chervona Ukraina*.¹³⁷ Bela Kun declared his own support for an "independent Soviet Ukraine" and intervened with Erno Pór, to resolve the situation. Vynnychenko, who had broken from the Directory and aligned himself with the Nezalezhnyky, was brought to Budapest by Kun on 30 March. These discussions with the pro-communist USDRP émigrés resulted in a programme being agreed that was presented by Kun to Moscow. It echoed the demands of the Nezalezhnyky calling for a "fully independent and sovereign Ukrainian Soviet Republic" with

The Government of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic to consist of the Nezalezhnyky Ukrainian Social Democrats, the left Ukrainian Social-Revolutionaries, and Ukrainian communists as well as those Ukrainian socialist parties who accept the platform of soviet power.¹³⁸

The "triple alliance of Russian, Ukrainian and Hungarian soviet republics"¹³⁹ caused international uproar over a new red plot when the text was intercepted by a Paris radio station. But Rakovsky missed the opportunity; he replied simply denouncing Vynnychenko as a "typical representative of petit bourgeois ideology" saying there was no sense in discussing any kind of alliances. Pór and Kun were "baffled". These demands brought no change in the policy in Ukraine; the Rumanian and Polish armies linked up and closed the road to Hungary and a desperate Kun wrote to Lenin that: "Forcing Rakovsky on the Ukrainians against their wishes, in my opinion, will be an irreparable mistake".¹⁴⁰ But it was the Nezalezhnyky who were to be blamed, not the Russian Communist policies themselves; the representatives of the KP(b)U made precisely this point in their response to the UKP Memorandum when it was resubmitted to the Comintern in 1924. The Nezalezhnyky uprising they said:

interfered with the prepared movement of soviet troops into Bessarabia and Galicia to join Soviet Hungary. As a result of this, the power of Polish and Rumanian Bourgeois was solidly established in Bessarabia and Galicia, and Soviet

¹³⁶ This had been long recognised; Karl Radek had said on 20 October 1918 at the KP(b)U congress that the "our road to aid the workers of the Central Powers lies precisely over Ukraine, over Romania, over Eastern Galicia and over Hungary" (Borys *Sovietization of Ukraine* 205).

¹³⁷ Its critical articles on the great disagreement in the international communist family caused some consternation with Soviet Russia; as a result one Russian and one Pole were imposed on the editorial staff (Halahan *Z Moïkh spomyniv* 455).

¹³⁸ Halahan *Z Moïkh spomyniv* 445-6.

¹³⁹ Mykola Halahan, *Z Moïkh spomyniv, 1880 ti 1920r*, Tempora, Kyiv, 2005, pp. 445-46.

¹⁴⁰ Cable sent 8 July 1919 (Rudolf Tokes, *Bela Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, Stanford 1967, p.201).

Hungary was strangled under the active participation of that same Rumanian army which now had no basis to fear for its rear lines.¹⁴¹

As can be seen this view of the *Nezalezhnyky* was not shared by the Hungarian communists nor the Red Army commander Antonov-Ovseyenko, who protested on 17 April 1919 that he was hindered because "policy in Ukraine cuts at the roots of the military leadership", he called for a coalition with the "*Nezalezhnyky* SD's and Ukrainian SR's" and that Russia treat Ukrainians with more "tact".¹⁴²

All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee (1919)

Unable to secure a reform of the Ukrainian SSR the *Nezalezhnyky* turned to open rebellion as the situation went from bad to worse. The decision of the *Nezalezhnyky* to start "fighting between the Russian Bolsheviks and Ukrainian Bolsheviks" was sparked by the mutiny of the Division led by Zeleny.¹⁴³ It was one of numerous such "misunderstandings" arising from the reneging on assurances that units would form part of a Ukrainian Red Army in an independent Republic.¹⁴⁴

The *Nezalezhnyky* "presumptuously threw itself into the seething masses, hoping to prevent their seizure by counter-revolutionary forces" and to try to "direct the uprising not against Soviet power as such, not against communist power, but against the power of the current government as an occupation power".¹⁴⁵ On 10 April they concluded a draft agreement with representatives of the UPSRs and the "official USDRP" for an uprising which stated:

The policy of the parties signing this agreement, both in the Council of the Republic and in other organs of state power, must be built on the following principles: 1. Strengthening and defence of the independence and autonomy of the national Ukrainian Republic; 2. Establishment of the government of the Working People (excluding elements which exploit the work of others); 3. Organization of the national economy in the interests of the working masses and a planned transition from the capitalist order to the socialist, with the immediate expropriation of non-working landed property.¹⁴⁶

According to this ambitious plan, the struggle would begin simultaneously on the territory held by the Ukrainian SSR while on the territory of the UNR they

¹⁴¹ Memorandum TsK KP(b)U Vikonkomu Kominternu, November 1924, M. Skypnik, A. Shumsky N. Popov (Mazurenko 551-2).

¹⁴² Adams 266.

¹⁴³ Tcherikover 373.

¹⁴⁴ The cause of the breach between Zeleny and the Bolshevik authorities was their decision to refuse the redistribution of the land of large sugar factories sought by the peasants. This fed into disagreements over the unit's status as a regiment of the Red Army, *Chervony Prapor* reporting that: "Zeleny stood and stands on the Soviet platform. The reason for the misunderstanding is Zeleny's unwillingness to meld into one with the Red Army, and Antonov knows why he is unwilling" (Khrystiuk IV).

¹⁴⁵ Mazurenko 248-53.

¹⁴⁶ Khrystiuk IV.

would oust Petlyura's Directory.¹⁴⁷ The Nezalezhnyky ran into problems from the start; the Borotbisty refused to participate and a small group of Nezalezhnyky led by Hukovych and Pankiv split.¹⁴⁸

Not waiting for others the Nezalezhnyky established an All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee based in Skvyra led by Yu. Mazurenko, Richytsky, Avdiyenko and Drahomyretsky. The insurgents included various red militias, the First Kyiv Soviet Division of Zeleny, the forces of Sokolovsky, Anhel and Yurko Tiutiunnyk of the Sixth Soviet Brigade. The *Revkom* "order no. 48" called for a "struggle against the betrayers of the working masses", the "occupation government of Rakovsky" and the arrest of the "traitorous Directory, which is negotiating with the French and other imperialists".¹⁴⁹

The uprising was not so much a struggle against Soviet Ukraine but a struggle for power *within* it.¹⁵⁰ Though larger than the Kronstadt uprising of 1921 the Nezalezhnyky rising has remained undistinguished from the wider Ukrainian "*jacquerie*".¹⁵¹ Yet it was historically unique: the Russian communists were challenged with demands for freely elected soviets by Marxists committed to communist revolution. The uprising spread rapidly and within three or four weeks the *Revkom* ruled several districts of the Right Bank. According to Bolshevik descriptions the rebel camp numbered 25,000, though others put it at between 5000 and 10,000.¹⁵² Buoyed by their initial success Mazurenko sent an ultimatum to Rakovsky:

Attention; Rakovsky, Head of the so-called Ukrainian Workers and Peasants Government

Executed 25th of June 1919 in the town of Skvyra

In the name of the insurgent Ukrainian working people I announce to you that the workers and peasants of Ukraine have risen in arms against you, as the government of the Russian conquerors, which, having draped itself in slogans that are sacred to us: 1. a government of soviets of workers and peasants, 2. the self-determination of nations, including secession, and 3. the struggle against imperialist conquerors and plunderers of the toiling masses, desecrates not only these sacred mottoes and ruining the true power of the workers and impoverished peasants of in the neighbouring country, but also uses them for aims that are remote from any socialist order.

It was their "swan song". Having believed that they had taken the leadership of the spontaneous movement, events started to prove otherwise. They had been

¹⁴⁷ Mazurenko 248-53.

¹⁴⁸ They split forming the "USDRP (Independents) Left" and began publishing the legal daily *Chervonyi Styah*. Along with the Borotbisty and the KP(b)U they later signed a joint statement charging Otaman Hryhoriiv's rebellion in the South as "betraying the revolution" (*Bilshovyk* 13 May 1919; Mazurenko 137-9).

¹⁴⁹ Signed by Drahomyretsky, Dybichenko, Selyanskyi, Vlasivskyi, Syrotenko, Secretary: Didych (Mazurenko 125-6).

¹⁵⁰ Richytsky "Memorandum" 45-66.

¹⁵¹ Indeed many of the Kronstadt rebels were Ukrainian recruits enrolled in autumn 1920 influenced by the very ideas of the insurgency of 1919.

¹⁵² Tcherikover 250.

misled over a change in the government of the UNR "that the reactionary wing had left, and that a new cabinet composed of socialists was nominated, which supports Soviet authority".¹⁵³ In fact now headed by Borys Martos it remained on the right and Petlyura remained head of the Directory.¹⁵⁴ A joint letter of the CC of the USDRP and UPSR claimed the "intention of some parties (Left SRs and SD Nezalezhnyky) to establish some sort of Ukrainian communism is a complete fantasy".¹⁵⁵

Mazurenko concluded: "The party overrated its strength, misread objective conditions and the consequences that could result from its false step, and was forced to concede defeat and to withdraw with its remaining force."¹⁵⁶ Faced with the advance of the Russian Volunteer Army the meeting on 18-19 July of members of the Organisational Committee and responsible workers took the decision to abandon the uprising. They later explained:

Some Nezalezhnyky organizations assumed the task of giving the rebel movement the ideological content of a struggle against the occupation policy of the Soviet government in Ukraine. They wanted to force the Soviet government to change its tactics but, lacking the strength to master the movement, were themselves beaten out of it by the Petlyurite counter-revolution, which itself was beaten by Denikin's counter-revolutionary army.¹⁵⁷

Condemned as the "Ukrainian Bolsheviks", Petlyura's forces disarmed the rebel units who had retreated into UNR territory; Mazurenko, Tkachenko, Richytsky and others were arrested.¹⁵⁸ Commander Diiachenko was shot and the others only saved by the intervention of the UPSRs.

In the summer of 1919 the Ukrainian SSR went into meltdown. This changed the correlation of power; it provided for a temporary revival of the UNR, whose army arrived at Kyiv at the same time as the Russian Volunteer Army of Denikin.

¹⁵³ Mazurenko, List Chlena Tsk USDRP (Nezalezhnyky) Yury Mazurenko Khr. Rakovskomu pro Yoho Stavkennya do polityky Idiyalnosti KP(b)U, 27 December 1999, *Dokumenti Trachichnoii Istorii Ukraini (1917-1927)* P. Bachinskyi ed, Kyiv 1999, pp. 248-53.

¹⁵⁴ It appears the more moderate leaders of the UPSR and USDRP still aligned with Petlyura did not know about the agreements made by their emissaries in Kyiv with the Nezalezhnyky. They then subsequently refused to back the pro-soviet positions of the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee. In a joint letter to the insurgent groups by, they stated: "Any party in Ukraine that stands for soviet power is liable to the same fate as the party of the Bolsheviks. Bolshevism in Russia is collapsing mainly because of internal disorder, because of the dissatisfaction of the peasants with soviet power. To model Ukrainian Soviet power on Russian Soviet power is absurd, because in principle these Bolshevisms do not differ from one another." Khrystiuk. *Zamitky i materialy*, Tom. IV, pp. 134-9.

¹⁵⁵ Khrystiuk IV.

¹⁵⁶ Mazurenko 248-53.

¹⁵⁷ *Chervony Prapor* No. 63, 25 December 1919.

¹⁵⁸ The moderate USDRP declared: "We did not believe what seemed to us absurd, that the peasants wanted to exchange strong Russian Bolsheviks for a sickly 'Ukrainian bolshevism' of those, who began ad hoc to call themselves left SRs or Nezalezhnyky . . . We declared to the Chief Staff and to the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee that they had become the victims of self-deception. The peasants rose up not for any Ukrainian soviet power, but in their own interests, both social and national". The Nezalezhnyky were accused of threatening to execute "those who agitated for the people's government and Otaman Petlyura" (*Vyzvolennia* 25 July 1919, p.124; Khrystiuk IV).

The "official USDRP" saw it as a victory over the communists boasting "history, as we foresaw, went according to Marx and not according to Lenin".¹⁵⁹ It was short-lived; in the face of Denikin the UNR also fragmented; *Robitnycha Hazeta* complained citizens saw little difference between Petlyura and Denikin.¹⁶⁰ The conservative Petrushevych placed the Galician Army at the service of Denikin, with Petlyura then turning to Pilsudski's Poland, signing away Eastern Galicia in return for an alliance.

First Congress of Ukrainian Communist Party (1920)

At the end of August 1919 the Organising Committee of the USDRP *Nezalezhnyky* held an underground conference, together with the prominent party comrades, which agreed to revive their previous efforts to constitute an independent Ukrainian Communist Party.¹⁶¹ Two other initiatives gave further expression to the need for a genuinely Ukrainian party. On 28 August the Borotbisty re-launched as the Ukrainian Communist Party (Borotbisty); though allied with the Bolsheviks, they had guarded their autonomy, seeking recognition as a section of the Comintern. With significant influence among the peasantry they remained committed to an independent soviet Ukraine.¹⁶² Also within the KP(b)U Yuri Lapchynsky, a member of the first Soviet government, along with Petro Slynko and Pavlo Popov, formerly of the US-D (Left) established the opposition "group of federalists". They called for a merger with the *Nezalezhnyky* and Borotbisty into "an entirely independent section of the International".¹⁶³

The federalists were defeated and the subsidiary KP(b)U reconstituted, but there was a rethink in the RKP(B) reflected in a series of resolutions by Lenin and Trotsky during the counter-offensive against Denikin. They declared the question of independence would not to be a barrier to communist unity, Russification should be challenged, and the commitment was given to convene an all-Ukrainian congress of soviets to freely decide on federalism, independence or fusion with

¹⁵⁹ *Robitnycha Hazeta* 25 August 1919.

¹⁶⁰ The central organ of the USDRP reported: "the growth of uncertainty about the difference between our government, our system of rule and that of Denikin" (*Robitnycha Hazeta* 5 October 1919).

¹⁶¹ *Chervony Prapor* 23 December 1919. The August conference and the spring efforts of the *Nezalezhnyky* contradict the assertion of James Mace that the *Nezalezhnyky* in founding the UKP had "imitated the Borotbisty" (Mace 76).

¹⁶² Hrushevsky writes that, "under the slogan of a Ukrainian Republic that would be independent yet Soviet and friendly toward the Bolsheviks and Soviet Russia, the masses flocked to their banner" (Mace 59).

¹⁶³ The Federalists were based with the Twelfth Red Army left behind during the retreat. The federalists convened a conference in Homel on 25-26 November 1919. Despite declaring it illegal the RKP(B) sent Zatonsky, Manuilsky and Kosoir who secured reconstitution of the KP(b)U and no unity until the others dropped calls for a Ukrainian Red Army, and independence.

Soviet Russia. Vynnychenko was cautious; the resolutions created "doubt" as to whether this was a "question only of tactics".¹⁶⁴ Yu. Mazurenko was more optimistic and wrote to Rakovsky that in "terms of the national question there are no particular differences between us and the decisions made by the CC of the RKP(B)".¹⁶⁵

The effect of the RKP(B) declarations had strategic significance bringing a degree of unity of the disparate Soviet forces in defeating Denikin. When the Red Army captured Kyiv on 16 December 1919, the *Nezalezhnyky* emerged from the underground as the Ukrainian Communist Party. On 21 December *Chervony Prapor* recommenced publication announcing:

1. The Organisational Committee of the USDRPN proclaims itself to be the Organisational Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party (USDRPN), based on the "Draft programme of the UKP".
2. All USDRPN Organisations are to discuss the "Draft programme" and to proclaim themselves to be the Organisations of the UKP (USDRPN).¹⁶⁶

The need for change was emphasised; twice the workers' revolution had been defeated, partly due to the immaturity of the internal forces, in turn making it possible for the external elements which "were unconnected to the Ukrainian historic development, to take hold of the socialist revolution in Ukraine". ("Orghanizatsiuhoho Komitety Ukrayins'ka Kommunistychna Partiya" (USDRP *Nezalezhnyky*), *Chervony Prapor*, 21 December 1919)

In such conditions the socialist revolution in Ukraine in both cases took the shape of the occupation of Ukraine by the Soviet Russia. Its leaders—the communists of Ukraine (Bolsheviks) logically had to be (and as a matter of fact they were) separated from the working masses of Ukraine, which turned against them. This led to the demoralization of the Red Army, to the weakening of the Red front, and to the crushing of the revolutionary forces.

To ensure the third victory of the Red Army over the forces of reaction and "its transformation into the universal proletarian revolution", it was essential that the internal forces "get control over the Ukrainian socialist revolution and shape its course and character".¹⁶⁷ Integral to this was "the recognition and support of the Ukrainian SSR's independence and its national Ukrainian character".¹⁶⁸ Another UKP leader V. Chumak argued that notwithstanding the recent declarations the KP(b)U as a branch of the RKP(B) continued to play a negative

¹⁶⁴ Vynnychenko *Vidrodzhennia natsii* Vol. 3 491.

¹⁶⁵ Mazurenko 248-53.

¹⁶⁶ *Chervony Prapor* 21 December 1919.

¹⁶⁷ "Orghanizatsiuhoho Komitety Ukrayins'ka Komunistychna Partiya" (USDRP *Nezalezhnyky*), *Chervony Prapor* 21 December 1919.

¹⁶⁸ "Orghanizatsiuhoho Komitety Ukrayins'ka Komunistychna Partiya" (USDRP *Nezalezhnyky*), *Chervony Prapor* 21 December 1919.

role; it was unable to adapt to Ukrainian conditions despite the opportunity to unite with the *Nezalezhnyky* and *Borotbisty* in a new party.¹⁶⁹

The UKP received a further boost, when Yu. Mazurenko secured agreement from the Politburo of the RKP(B) on 13 January 1920 to recognise the UKP as a legal party and to permit state funding.¹⁷⁰ When the UKP held its first congress on 22-25 January 1920 it took on a new lease of life.¹⁷¹ A Communist Youth League was launched led by Petro Synyavsky and Yakiv Chmil, previously a member of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U organisation of youth.¹⁷² The UKP also directed efforts towards re-establishing the All-Ukrainian trade union centre as a separate section of the Red International of Labour Unions.¹⁷³ One of the most important decisions of the congress was the adoption of the draft programme written by Tkachenko and Richytsky.¹⁷⁴

The UKP declared their support for the Communist International, their programme declaring: "the only leader of the proletariat in the struggle to realise the social revolution is the International Communist Party, of which the Ukrainian Communist Party is a part".¹⁷⁵ They maintained direct international links and while having respect for the theorists of Russian Marxism, the UKP "refuted the Russian trend as an obsolete phenomenon in comparison to Western Europe", orienting themselves to European and particularly German Marxist internationalism.¹⁷⁶ Mazurenko considered that the programme of the RKP(B) was the "foundation of the UKP programme".¹⁷⁷ Yet it would be an error to consider that the work of Tkachenko and Richytsky was simply a reformulation, a point illustrated in a critical comparison in the pamphlet *Two Programmes* by Richytsky.¹⁷⁸

The Programme of the Ukrainian Communist Party reflected all the optimism of the period believing the "time for the transfer to a higher, communist form of public economy has arrived". Only a communist revolution could liberate humanity, one that "combines the tasks of the social and national liberation of the workers, destroys capitalism and imperialism" ("Prohrama Ukrainskoi Kommunistychnoi Partii", Biblioteka Nova Doba, no. 18,

¹⁶⁹ Chumak was Kyiv editor of the relaunched paper, *Chervony Prapor*, 23 December 1919.

¹⁷⁰ The *Nezalezhnyky* had sent Tkachenko to negotiate with the RKP(B) Central Committee, but on his way to Moscow he was taken ill with typhus and died; he was replaced by Yu. Mazurenko (Chyrko 24-35).

¹⁷¹ Representatives attended from organisations in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Katerynoslav and Poltava (*Chervony Prapor* 27 January 1920).

¹⁷² Maistrenko *Istoriia Moho Pokolinnia* 162.

¹⁷³ Chyrko 24-35.

¹⁷⁴ Prohrama Ukrainskoi Kommunistychnoi Partii, Mikh Tkachenko i And Richytsky. It was published in Russian and Ukrainian editions by the UKP, all citations are the Nova Doba edition (Tkachenko and Richytsky).

¹⁷⁵ "Prohrama Ukrainskai Kommunistychnoi Partii", *Nova Doba*, no. 18, 1920, p.3.

¹⁷⁶ Maistrenko *Istoriia Moho Pokolinnia* 162. This is an unexplored aspect of Ukrainian Communism; Matvi Yavorsky for example drew heavily on Lukacs and Gramsci in his disputes at a time when Zinoviev was denouncing Lukacs.

¹⁷⁷ This programme was adopted on 23 March 1919 at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party Bolsheviks (Mazurenko 248-53).

¹⁷⁸ Anndiy Richytsky, *Dvi Prohramy*, Kyiv March 1919.

Vienna-Kyiv 1920, p.4):

This social, communist revolution replaces the private ownership of the means of production and exchange with ownership by society leading to the suitably planned organization of the process of social production in order to ensure prosperity and all-round growth for all members of society, removing the division of society into classes, liberating oppressed humanity and eliminating all forms of exploitation of one part of society by another.¹⁷⁹

There was no hint of “national communism” with the UKP asserting that “the liberation of labour can only be international”.¹⁸⁰ On the national question their analysis was dialectical; the world of early twentieth-century capitalism was characterised by the dominance of “strong state organisations over the weak” and in negation arose a counter-tendency towards revival and national formation:

But, having drawn all the more firmly these vanquished economic entities into the world wide capitalist system; capitalism has strengthened its economy internally through its own economic and geographical conditions and its existing economic cohesiveness, thus increasing its resistance in the face of the strength of imperialism.¹⁸¹

The Ukrainian revolution had been a national one from the start, with the desire to break out of the constraints imposed by imperialism; with the disintegration of capital it had become a communist revolution directed towards an “independent and self-managed economy and political status for the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic”. Elsewhere Richytsky wrote that these “points have remained obscure in the RKP(b) programme”, that they “ignore concrete national circumstances, the link between the national question and the economy. They welcome rights in small matters, but do not deal in facts... The UKP’s national programme is a concrete one”.¹⁸²

The eradication of national oppression was closely linked to development of the new social relations, envisaging the “mass of the working population to be drawn into the process of communist construction”. The UKP advocated:

active support for the development of each national culture, first of all the culture of the basic mass of toiling people of Ukraine, of Ukrainian nationality, and then of the national minorities—Russian, Jewish, Polish and others; thus will be removed anything that tends to denationalization, that is, to holding back the consciousness of the masses or their cultural strength and which leads to bitter national struggle.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Tkachenko and Richytsky 8.

¹⁸⁰ I have refrained from using the term “national communism” which has been used by some scholars to define dissident Ukrainian Marxism which defended the national liberation of Ukraine. This was not a term used by such individuals or organisations to define themselves. Volodymyr Levynsky of the UKP Foreign Group wrote an article in 1920 explicitly rejecting the term which was identified with chauvinism within the communist party of dominant nations such as Russia and Germany (Levynsky “Sotsialistychna revoliutsiia i Ukraina”).

¹⁸¹ Tkachenko and Richytsky 16.

¹⁸² *Chervonyi Prapor* 26 March 1920.

¹⁸³ Tkachenko and Richytsky 29.

The UKP conception of Soviet Ukraine was in contrast to the state socialist model with its tendency towards bureaucracy; instead the "communist revolution must function through organs specifically organised by the workers" themselves, the workers' councils were central, "there is *inevitably a close link between the communist revolution and the soviet organisation of power*".¹⁸⁴ The "organisational structure of socialised industry in the very first instance should rely on trade unions", as participants in the administration who "should be able to draw the workers immediately into the running of the economy".¹⁸⁵ Correspondingly the UKP view of "common ownership was integral to the means of transcending of the capitalist economy, through "organizing the entire population into a huge single network of consuming communes".¹⁸⁶

Fourth Congress of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Councils (1920)

For a few months in 1920 the Ukrainian SSR contained a plurality of soviet parties, the KP(b)U, the UKP(Borotbisty) and the UKP (Nezalezhnyky); in addition several smaller Jewish Communist Parties existed legally. At the Kyiv workers' conference in February 1920 they vied for support, but this did not represent a revival of the heady days of 1917—the trend was in the opposite direction.¹⁸⁷ The RKP(B) had used its influence in the Comintern to deny recognition of the Borotbisty and to insist on amalgamation with the KP(b)U; seeing it as their best option the UKP(Borotbisty) congress voted to disband in March.¹⁸⁸

The UKP had remained highly critical of the Borotbisty, considering they were constrained by their populist heritage, "narodniks in communist rags" being Richytsky's description.¹⁸⁹ They were criticised as opportunists for their role in the government. Richytsky wrote:

We bypassed, in Vasyl Blakytny's phrase the "path of bloody mistakes", and also the path of cruel struggle in the heart of the insurrection. When the counter-revolution failed to swallow us, we found our way to fight it, and that is to our credit, not yours. Now you have climbed on our backs into the Council of People's Commissars, in hushed tones you thanked us, for it was through us that they started paying you attention... We originated in the masses, we have traversed with them the same bloody road, and we did not rely on communist carpeted offices, but had faith in the social forces.¹⁹⁰

The dissolution of the Borotbisty caused controversy on the Ukrainian left; in some ways it enhanced the position of the UKP. This was a view endorsed by the

¹⁸⁴Tkachenko and Richytsky 23.

¹⁸⁵Tkachenko and Richytsky 4-46.

¹⁸⁶Tkachenko and Richytsky 36.

¹⁸⁷*Chervony Prapor* 12 February 1920.

¹⁸⁸With 4000 being admitted to the KP(b)U (Maistrenko Borotbism 206).

¹⁸⁹*Chervony Prapor* 29 January 1920.

¹⁹⁰*Chervony Prapor* 29 January 1920.

sovietophile émigrés such Hrushevsky, Hryhoryiv and Chechel who wrote:

External circumstances proved stronger, the Borotbisty had to comply with Moscow's demands, if they did not want to be deprived of the opportunity of carrying on their work among the Ukrainian masses. The Ukrainian Communist Party (the former Independent Social Democrats) remained true to its platform, persisting in the creation of a party independent of Russian Communists which would be a section of the Third International and not a branch of the Russian Communist Party.¹⁹¹

Through the course of 1920 the UKP continued to grow significantly, including many Borotbisty who disagreed with the fusion, seeing in it not so much unity as conformity.¹⁹² Overall the situation was not improving in the Ukrainian SSR. Richytsky observed that: "The revolution is like a bomb that explodes because of the dynamite stored in it. Usually, a bomb once thrown will explode. Already Moscow has thrown this bomb into Ukraine three times, but it has yet to explode".¹⁹³ The countryside remained the scene of constant peasant unrest. The policy of requisitioning continued as vigorously as the previous year still executed by *Komnezamy*. They proved a blunt instrument, with peasant disdain exacerbated by their largely non-Ukrainian composition.¹⁹⁴ *Chervony Prapor* observed:

The Communists of Ukraine in general do not have any principled line, when they do have one; it always misses the point . . . This party and the Committees of Poor Peasants have hurtled into Ukraine, and then destroyed all paths to the masses.¹⁹⁵

Richytsky's view of the KP(b)U was that "their communism is delayed by left SR attitudes".¹⁹⁶ The third land law put forward by the Soviet Government, Richytsky felt, weakened the class struggle and was a policy from which "only the kulaks benefit" a "petty bourgeois land law" operating "in accordance with the peasant economy" (*Chervony Prapor*, 20 March 1920).

In April there was a new political crisis. Poland invaded Soviet Ukraine claiming legitimacy from an agreement between Petlyura and Pilsudski and captured Kyiv on 7 May 1920. That it was a Polish army which marched in victory in Kyiv confirmed to many what was seen as window dressing for the return of an old ruler.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹¹ Maistrenko *Borotbism* 195-6.

¹⁹² Of the 4000 Borotbisty who were admitted to the KP(b)U in 1920 only 118 remained after the purge of the following year; this contrasted with 1932 former Russian Mensheviks and 771 Russian SRs (Borys "Who Ruled" 219).

¹⁹³ *Chervony Prapor* 20 March 1920.

¹⁹⁴ Krawchenko 62.

¹⁹⁵ *Chervony Prapor* 29 January 1920.

¹⁹⁶ *Chervony Prapor* 29 January 1920.

¹⁹⁷ The "Bureau of the Central Committee of the USDRP" was party to the debacle. The government of Prime Minister Mazepa had not met since late 1919, then twelve days into the occupation these Social Democrats attempted to disassociate themselves from events. On 19 May the leaders of the USDRP decided that Mazepa should resign. This still did not extricate them from identification with the "Polish orientation" as it was dubbed, for Mazepa remained in the new Cabinet headed by the Socialist Federalist Vyacheslav Prokopovych (Vynnychenko *Schodennyk* 432).

The UKP Central Committee ordered their membership be put on to a state of war, and began organising the mobilisation into the Red Army of UKP members. Despite the wartime unity there was no let up in the disagreements over the shape of the Ukrainian SSR. They resurfaced at the Fourth All-Ukraine Congress of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Soviets in Kharkiv.

It soon became apparent that the previous promise of the RKP(B) that this congress would freely decide Ukraine's fate was being reneged upon. As series of decrees diminished the representation of the peasantry *and* the working class, those soviets that had revived were hampered by efforts to reduce them to auxiliary organs of the KP(b)U, the *Komnezamy* were instructed to exclude non-KP(b)U members.¹⁹⁸ The political landscape of the congress was shaped by the RKP(B) before it was convened; the entire elected Central Committee of the KP(b)U was removed by Moscow in March after the opposition Democratic Centralists secured a majority.¹⁹⁹

These events reinforced the UKP case for an independent party; furthermore they warned the bureaucracy was taking on a life of its own, with an apparatus of "responsible officials on their way through" from Russia warning: "These people are creating a caste, today in Ukraine, tomorrow in Turkestan, then in the Caucasus, everywhere alike they are themselves, use the same methods".²⁰⁰

In their declaration to the Fourth All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets the UKP argued the Ukrainian social revolution was "taking place under unprecedented contradictions, facing terrible defeats in the process of the international proletariat's struggle with world capital for establishing the communist society".²⁰¹ In its struggle the main enemy was the "Petlyurashchina" representing the "internal counterrevolution and reaction", who gained influence due to the "unsuccessful policy of those forces of Ukrainian revolution, which until the present time are coming from outside and ruling the revolutionary movement in Ukraine". Even with help of others, victory would only be ensured for the workers' revolution via an internal civil war:

when it will not be a war between two states organizations as it happens at present—on the one side the Polish-Petlyurovite state system with its

¹⁹⁸ Krawchenko 274 n.103.

¹⁹⁹ Krawchenko has argued that as regards the KP(b)U the longer it existed on Ukrainian soil the more it came to identify with particularistic demands of the republic; this was expressed in the various oppositions that emerged within the RKP(B) (Krawchenko 102). This would appear to be the case with the Democratic Centralists in Ukraine and Russia. During the debates over the role of Communist Party members in the Trade Unions the "democratic centralists" proposed a resolution, passed by the Moscow Party, to the effect that "Party discipline in every case takes precedence over trade union discipline". On the other hand the Southern Bureau, (Ukrainian) of the all Russian Congress of Trade Unions passed a resolution on autonomy for Party trade unionists and got it passed by the Fourth KP(b)U Conference.

²⁰⁰ *Chervonyi Prapor* 9 May 1920.

²⁰¹ Deklyaratsiya Ukrainskoi Kommunistychnoi Parti na IV V se Ukrainskomu Zizdi Rad, *Nova Doba*, 14 August 1920.

"independence" of Ukraine; and on the other side the Russian-Ukrainian state system with its "regionalism" towards Ukraine.

(Ibid. Deklyaratsiya, *Nova Doba*, 14 August 1920, pp. 3-4)

Success was dependent "not only on the number of the Red Army's bayonets", but also on that state policy as regards the organisational forms by which the proletariat organises itself.²⁰² The key UKP speakers Avdiyenko and Yurko Mazurenko were supported by the Jewish Communist Party-Poale Zion, who caused uproar in their contention that the congress must "give the most resolute, sharp and clear answers on this policy". In its state form this must be independent; subordination to Moscow was "paralyzing proletarian activity and creative work".²⁰³ The UKP and their allies were unable to carry the 800 delegates, though three of the Central Committee, Richytsky, Avdiyenko and Mazurenko were elected to the Central Executive Committee of the Ukrainian SSR.

This failure of the Bolsheviks to learn from the disasters of the previous year and the agitation of the Ukrainian Communists began to impact on the KP(b)U itself. A number of the Borotbisty who had joined the KP(b)U resigned and joined the UKP.²⁰⁴ Of real concern was the defection of the Bolshevik leader Lapchynsky to the UKP in July 1920. Even more damaging, he went public with an open letter published in *Chervony Prapor* and abroad in *Nova Doba*, the organ of the Foreign Group of the UKP. In it Lapchynsky detailed the contradictory tendencies and disastrous failings of the Bolshevik party in 1917 and again in 1919 when a truly independent Soviet Republic was possible.²⁰⁵ He had hoped when the Borotbisty joined the KP(b)U it would strengthen the "healthy current inside the KP(b)U" but he was disappointed:

despite the November RKP(B) conference verbally declaring a change of the policy in Ukraine, it in fact decided to keep the previous years methods of party and state management of this country. The leadership was transferred to those persons, who both formally and in fact were guilty for the last years defeat and, moreover, the elements, who ruined the realisation by the Peoples Secretariat's correctly outlined plan as early as 1917, were added to them.²⁰⁶

He warned that they faced the danger in 1920 of an even deeper crisis than in 1919; the solution was an independent Communist Party, a member of the

²⁰² Deklyaratsiy. *Nova Doba* 14 August 1920.

²⁰³ Deklyaratsiy. *Nova Doba* 14 August 1920.

²⁰⁴ A further split in the KP(b)U occurred after the Congress when the "Kobelyaki Communists" who had joined with the Borotbisty also joined the UKP. They issued a declaration stating that as the KP(b)U was "fighting for the preservation of the Russian state the Ukrainian Communists would betray the Revolution and the Ukrainian people if they remained in the party". The declaration included the KP(b)U District Committee leaders, some older Bolsheviks and five Jewish party activists (Maistrenko *Borotbism* 240-245).

²⁰⁵ This was published by the UKP in *Chervony Prapor*, 25 July 1920, and also abroad by the Foreign Group in a pamphlet, *Revoliutsiia v nebezpetsi! Lyst zakorionoi hrupy UKP do komunistiy i revoliutsiynykh soismnishv Evropy ta Ameryky* [Revolution in Danger! Letter to Communists and Revolutionary Socialists in Europe and America], Biblioteka *Novy Doba*, Vienna-Kyiv, 1920.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

Comintern with equal rights to parties of other countries, independent centres of the Ukrainian labour movement and a fully independent government. Lapchynsky claimed these views were shared by the "vast majority of local Ukrainian Bolsheviks and all former Borotbisty".²⁰⁷ The events surrounding the congress of soviets had convinced Lapchynsky it was now "impossible, remaining inside the present KP(b)U, to disseminate the views presented by me".²⁰⁸ It was the UKP which could build Soviet Ukraine and its programme was the basis for uniting all communist forces of Ukraine.

Second All-Ukraine Congress of the UKP (August 1920)

The second half of 1920 was one of significant growth of the Ukrainian Communist Party; it also coincided with an unprecedented surge in Russian chauvinism during the counter-offensive against Poland.²⁰⁹ This got so bad that the Red Army journal *Veonnoe delo* was suspended.²¹⁰ It was described by Ukrainian Communists as a form of "national communism" specific to the imperial nations which had suffered "humiliations and degradations during the world war". Levynsky of the Foreign Group of the UKP wrote:

The fact that innumerable Tsarist officers, of higher and lower ranks, Tsarist in their worldview and rearing, moved en masse into the Red Army; and everybody knows this is so only because they were convinced that in a given situation this army would be the only one that could reconstruct the "one and indivisible".²¹¹

Vynnychenko, then representing the Foreign Group, was in Moscow and confided to his diary: "when one is orientated towards Russian patriotism, it is clearly impossible to have an orientation towards federation, self-determination, or anything else that might upset the "one and indivisible".²¹² In Germany the dissident KAPD had excluded Heinrich Laufenberg and the "national Bolsheviks" from its ranks but no such action took place in the RKP(B). In despair Vynnychenko wrote to Lenin appealing that they wage the war "not as a national but as social war; the socialist Russo-Ukrainian union to defeat the bourgeois counter revolutionary Polish-Ukrainian union".²¹³

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Radek characterised the war as a "national struggle of liberation against foreign invasion", in which they were "defending Mother Russia", and their goal was to "reunite all the Russian lands and defend Russia from colonial exploitation" (*Pravda* 12 May 1920; Figs 699).

²¹⁰ Figs 699.

²¹¹ *Nova Doba* 6 March 1920, republished as a pamphlet, *Sotsyialistichna revolyutsiya i Ukraina*, Biblioteka Nova Doba, No. 3 1920 p.12.

²¹² Vynnychenko *Schodennyk* 431-2.

²¹³ Vynnychenko *Schodennyk* 432-3.

Ukraine was one of the first victims of this chauvinism; on 22 June the KP(b)U Politburo decided: "To immediately start a political campaign against the UKP".²¹⁴ The state funding of the party was curtailed, and the Kuban Organisation of the UKP broken up by the authorities, their leader Klimenka arrested and deported from the area.²¹⁵ Then on 12 July *Chervony Prapor* was suspended from publication, the Politburo stating that "it conducts a demagogic campaign of sowing dissension among the working masses".²¹⁶ This took place barely a week before the Second Congress of the Communist International gathered to discuss, among other things, the national and colonial question.

To the UKP the retrogression facing the revolution in Russia and Ukraine was one thing, but the Communist International, still on the rise, with its diverse currents of opinion—was quite another situation. When the Second Congress of the Comintern was called the UKP sought to affiliate in solidarity with the communist parties of other countries. A Moscow Bureau was established and the UKP sent as their delegate the Secretary of the UKP Central Committee Lapchynsky, accompanied by the Galician activist Nikifor Hirnyak, a German speaker.²¹⁷ Vynnychenko was also present, having been granted credentials by Karl Radek.²¹⁸ However, once the congress got underway issues arose over the recognition of the UKP delegates. On 5 August Radek reported that on the insistence of unnamed "Ukrainian comrades", the Credentials Commission would not recognise the UKP, stating: "As comrades may know, a small group has formed which numbers between 100 and 500 members. It is clear that this is a very small group which has nothing to do with concrete communist work."²¹⁹

Ukraine was treated less favourably than any other country represented; in the appeal summoning the congress Radek had stated those "organisations that stand on the basis of the Communist International but are in opposition to the officially affiliated Communist Parties are also called upon to take part in the Congress".²²⁰ Thus the two German communist parties, the KPD and KAPD were able to send delegates. But not only was the UKP, which had members in the Soviet government, not recognised—even the KP(b)U had its credentials revoked on the grounds it was not a separate party but part of the RKP(B). Despite these

²¹⁴ Mazurenko 298.

²¹⁵ *Nova Doba* No.40 1920.

²¹⁶ Mazurenko 301.

²¹⁷ Hirniak.

²¹⁸ In May 1920 the Foreign Group of the UKP sought to intervene directly in the politics of Soviet Ukraine through a mission by Vynnychenko to Moscow and Kharkiv. On 5 May they decided that among the aims of the mission was the unity of the UKP and KP(b)U. While Vynnychenko seemed to have an idea of his objectives he was erratic in his approach, he did not act in consultation or unison with the UKP before or after he arrived but negotiated either from a personal standpoint or in the name of the ZG.UKP. These factors were to prove cause for friction. On Vynnychenko's mission see: Czajkowskyj; Gilley.

²¹⁹ Second Congress of the Communist International Minutes of the Proceedings, ed. R.A. Archer, London, 1977, Vol. 2, p.151.

²²⁰ In fact a string of critical groups were allowed to attend the congress as "Consultative Delegates" with no voice and no vote. This included from the Germany the Independent Social Democratic Party, and from Russia the Party of Revolutionary Communism and the Jewish Kombund (Archer Vol. 11).

manoeuvres the UKP were not silenced; they issued a "Memorandum of the Ukrainian Communist Party to the Congress of the Third Communist International".²²¹ Written by Richytsky the Memorandum was published by the UKP in Kharkiv and republished by the Foreign Group in Vienna.

The Memorandum built on the UKP's previous work and that of the Ukrainian Marxists, such as Vasyl Shakhrai and Serhii Mazlakh, the dissident Ukrainian Bolsheviks.²²² Arising from the tendencies of the development of world capitalism in its phase of imperialist finance capital, new subjective forces of revolt had arisen. While the principal force manifested was "world proletarian revolution which started in Russia", it was necessary to recognise that "capitalist development fosters the tendency of the enslaved colonial peoples into a struggle for national liberation—towards independent statehood" (p.531). The task of the national revolutions was to unshackle the productive forces from the constraints and distortions of imperialism; creation of independent workers' republics was an indispensable resource if the working class was to transcend global capital. If the working class sought to create communist society on the basis of only one of the two contradictory tendencies of the productive forces, then it would result in a fragmentation and negation of itself. The UKP summarised their analysis in the following terms:

It is, therefore, unthinkable and reactionary to attempt any forcible transfer of the proletarian revolution inside borders of the old imperialist states. The task of the international proletariat is to draw towards the communist revolution and the construction of a new society not only the advanced capitalist countries but also the less developed peoples of the colonies,—*taking advantage of their national revolutions. To fulfil this task, it must take an active part in these revolutions and play the leading role in the perspective of the permanent revolution, prevent the national bourgeoisie from limiting them at the level of fulfilling demand of national liberation.* It is necessary to continue the struggle through to the seizure of power and the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and to *lead the bourgeois democratic revolution to the end* through the establishment of national states destined to join the universal network of international union of the emerging Soviet republics based on the forces of *local* proletarian and working masses of each country with the mutual aid of all the detachments of world revolution.²²³

The approach of the UKP was unique; they were the only communist party that referred to the concept of *permanent revolution* during the entire course of the Russian Revolution. It was from this understanding of the dialectics of the world revolutionary process that one could "comprehend the course and character of

²²¹ Richytsky "Memorandum".

²²² Shakhrai was a USDRP organiser and then leader of the Poltava Bolsheviks. He published *Revoliutsiia na Ukraïni* [Revolution in Ukraine] in 1918, and with his Ukrainian Jewish comrade Serhii Maslakh, published *Do khvyli: Shcho diiet'sia na Ukraïni i z Ukraïnoi* [Concerning the Moment: What Is Happening in and to Ukraine]. They helped lay the theoretical foundations of pro-independence Ukrainian communism. They argued for an independent communist party and that the tendency of the revolution was an independent Soviet Republic.

²²³ Richytsky "Memorandum" 54.

the Ukrainian revolution, and thus determine the tasks of the Ukrainian proletariat and its communist party".²²⁴ These were the unresolved contradictions of the struggle of both internal and external social forces in Ukraine which hindered the class struggle and retarded the revolution. This had "affected the entire course of the Ukrainian revolution, which has so far been unable to develop fully into a communist revolution" (p.540). The Memorandum contained a chillingly accurate prognosis of the prospects for a reformist movement within the KP(b)U:

Past experience has shown that there is no guarantee that a healthy revolutionary current will prevail by organic means within the KP(b)U, for the envoys of the RKP, the formal leaders of the KP(b)U, will not stop at the physical destruction of party opposition as well as putting an end to any comradesly relations within the party, in fact destroying the party, in effect abolishing the party statutes and stifling its entire elective culture by means of party officials appointed from above - just so as not to prevent a spontaneously opposition inside their own party to seize power. Ibid *Memorandum* pp.543-44.²²⁵

Predicting in many ways what would arise with the policy of Ukrainisation, the UKP highlighted the inadequacy of a purely cultural reform movement by the KP(b)U which:

in order to satisfy somehow the desire of the broad working masses for a healthy economy, turning a former Russian colony into a country on an equal footing with other members of the future world union of soviet countries, they are attempting to introduce a purely bourgeois national-cultural autonomy, thus announcing their readiness to move towards the national mood in Ukraine.²²⁶

Such an initiative by the KP(b)U could not succeed "given their complete separation from the national element and organic inability because they carry out blindly the orders and plans of their centre—the RKP(B)" (p.544). Incapable of being the representative of the internal forces of the Ukrainian revolution this "makes a genuine break with the KP(b)U and the creation of a centre to attract the internal proletarian forces inevitable" (p.544).

The Second All-Ukraine Congress of the UKP took place on 5-9 August 1920 in Kharkiv; despite being troubled by an "array of scorpions", it was considered a positive result of their activities.²²⁷ According to Maistrenko it was "the time of its greatest success", claiming 3000 members, and eighty-one delegates were in attendance, representing thirty organisations of the UKP.²²⁸ Despite their difficulties the UKP still obtained material assistance from the Bolshevik

²²⁴ Richytsky "Memorandum" 55.

²²⁵ Richytsky "Memorandum" 59.

²²⁶ Richytsky "Memorandum" 60.

²²⁷ Scorpions is how one statement by the UKP wrote of those harassing them (*Nova Doba* No. 41 1920; Maistrenko *Istoriia Moho Pokolinnia* 147).

²²⁸ *Nova Doba* No. 41 1920.

government, such as board and lodgings for the Congress. The UKP was optimistic, on the international arena at least, considering:

The Russian proletarian revolution had increasingly assumed a world character. The Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR) is becoming a primary factor in the relations of world socialist forces and an organizational centre in the fight for the international proletariat (Europe and American) is emerging from a passive stage to one of struggle.²²⁹

Amidst the post-war economic crisis the Western workers' movement was grappling with the problems of overthrowing capital and "reconstituting the economy on a new basis". There was however growing strength and militancy in the West and new additions of mass workers' parties to the Communist International.²³⁰ The congress reaffirmed its support for the Comintern and agreed to again seek admission into the Comintern, agreeing to the twenty-one points of conditions of membership decreed by the Second Congress of the Comintern. They emphasised that the Comintern decreed the necessity "in every country of a single communist party", in respect of which the UKP programme formed the basis for the re-composition of the UKP as its section.²³¹ "It was in the interests of the international proletariat that Ukraine be established as an independent Soviet republic".

As early as December 1920 concerns over repression were being raised by Richytsky and Mazurenko in an open letter to Lenin, complaining about restrictions on their meetings, the prohibition of *Chervony Prapor* and their papers in Katerynoslav, Poltava, Donbas and Kyiv.²³² They argued that this effort to prevent their work or eliminate them was "deeply reactionary and harmful to the interests of the revolution".²³³ In another complaint the UKP Politburo complained of being reduced to an "illegal condition"; problems now included the arrest of their comrades, for whose release they petitioned.²³⁴

Vynnychenko wrote an open letter to Communists and Revolutionary Socialists in Europe and America entitled "The Revolution in Danger". He warned: "The methods of 'unified control', individualism and personal centralism lead to arid bureaucratism and Bonapartism, and result in the utter demoralisation of the working masses."²³⁵

They can see communist commissars extort, steal, live luxuriously, whilst the workers toil and go hungry in poverty. They have seen these tendencies increase,

²²⁹ *Nova Doba* No. 41 1920.

²³⁰ *Nova Doba* No. 41 1920.

²³¹ II Konferentsiia UKP v Kharhovi, *Nova Doba* No. 41, Vienna 11 December 1920.

²³² *Nova Doba* 11 December 1920.

²³³ *Nova Doba* 11 December 1920.

²³⁴ *Nova Doba* 11 December 1920.

²³⁵ Vynnychenko "Revoliutsiia v nebezpetsi!" pp. 13-14.

taking root, becoming a new bourgeoisie, a new class of exploiters, living off the surplus value of the workers, by its existence and social status in reality trampling on the idea of annihilating the domination of the parasite classes.²³⁶

The winter of 1920-1921 proved a critical conjuncture in the revolution. A social revolution had not succeeded in the West and the invasion of Poland proved a fatal error: exacerbating the Polish national question, it saw the defeat of the Red Army and the re-partition of Ukraine.²³⁷ The foreign military intervention and civil war was practically ended but at the same time there was a perceptible ebb in the tide of the revolutionary struggle in the capitalist countries. Soviet Ukraine was intact but it was far from that conceived by the Ukrainian Communists. Maistrenko recalled in Kharkiv they were eating soups similar to those he ate later in the Siberian gulag.²³⁸ Though exhausted, workers expressed their opposition to War Communism with large strikes at the Kyiv Arsenal, the Kharkiv Locomotive Works, and on the railways in Katerynoslav.²³⁹ Within the ruling RKP(B) critical voices were raised by the Workers Opposition and Democratic Centralists; both factions had strong followings in Ukraine. There emerged a broad response to the retreat in the revolution, with advocates from different quarters seeking a reconstitution of workers' democratic management of the republic. At the KP(b)U Fifth Conference in Kharkiv on 12-20 November 1920, the majority of delegates were Red Army soldiers from Russian units stationed in Ukraine. Sapronov's Democratic Centralist opposition was present as was the Workers Opposition, both part of disparate efforts to regenerate the revolution now in retreat.

In January 1921 the UKP rejected the possibility of changing Moscow's policy in Ukraine by entering the KP(b)U to reform it from within; it was they said an "artificial institution" and a "bureaucratic, obedient machine". In contrast, the

UKP is an historic, natural, organic necessity. This party did not fall into Ukraine, prepared by a blind apparatus, behind the bayonets of Red Army. It grew out of the needs of the Ukrainian workers having passed through the stage of the old Ukrainian Social Democracy. In keeping with the workers revolutionary traditions and being itself a living continuation, consecutive development of the Ukrainian proletarian movement.²⁴⁰

They placed their hope on world revolution negating the internal developments of "Moscow centralism and bureaucracy", considering that a "victory for the principles of workers democracy will abrogate the technical need for

²³⁶ Vynnychenko "Revoliutsia v nebezpetsi!" pp. 13-14.

²³⁷ Ending the possibility of sobornist, unity of Ukrainian territory with the founding of the Galician Soviet Socialist Republic on 8 July 1920. See Solchanyk "The Comintern"; Solchanyk "Foundation of the Communist Movement"; Davies.

²³⁸ Maistrenko *Istoriia Moho Pokolinnia* 160.

²³⁹ Holubnychy 80; Bojcun "Working Class" 475.

²⁴⁰ *Nova Doba* 29 January 1921.

this apparatus". While they were unsure as to the tempo of the revolution in Western Europe they confidently stated that "the UKP will not pass away".²⁴¹ Despite organisational growth the position of the UKP was a precarious one but they stepped up their activities regardless.

At the Tenth Congress of the RKP(B) in March the Workers Opposition was defeated and factions banned; the Kronstadt rebels were suppressed. War Communism was abandoned and Lenin's New Economic Policy introduced, this began to be implemented in Ukraine in May 1921.

The UKP, pointing to the failure of the Borotbists in the KP(b)U and events in the RKP(B), looked to increase their activity outside the Bolsheviks' restraints. In workers' councils where they had fractions the UKP campaigned for Ukrainisation; despite the restrictions they also continued to publish, and distributed leaflets at workers' demonstrations and meetings, arguing for independence, improvements in workers' conditions, opposing economic inequality.²⁴² They started an organising campaign in the industrial area of Donbas. But this was slow progress. Maistrenko, a UKP organiser, writes:

We didn't have big organisation anywhere, not due to the absence of approval (among the Ukrainian workers we had more approval than the Bolsheviks), but due to devastation, famine and disordered social and cultural life. ... For the most part, the workers were politically and nationally passive. I came to the conclusion that it was impossible to make a separate communist party at the Donets Basin on the basis of exclusively national differences.²⁴³

Such problems fed into the deep inner party arguments which took place in the run up to the Second Congress of the UKP. The debates over how to relate to the new situation proved heated and caused a fracturing of the leadership. Lapchynsky gave a report on the desired structure of Soviet power in Ukraine; it was in accordance with the views of the Democratic Centralist opposition, which was especially strong in Ukraine. He was in a minority; the only others in the leadership who shared his views were Yakiv Zamochnyk and Drahomyretsky. Richytsky in particular, argued against Lapchynsky's line from the position of the Bolshevik leadership. He called his opponents "the neophytes" of orthodox communism.²⁴⁴

Paradoxically the view of Richytsky and the majority with regard to the New Economic Policy (NEP) was closer to the communist left opposition; they opposed the NEP as leading to the restoration of capitalism and to the ruin of proletariat and peasantry, linking it to the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution. This was the policy adopted at the conference.

In the summer of 1921 the KP(b)U, provincial committees and district party committees were told that UKP "organisations should be recognized as Petlyurist and counter-revolutionary", expulsions began from the soviets and other bodies.

²⁴¹ *Nova Doba* 29 January 1921.

²⁴² Chyrko 32.

²⁴³ Maistrenko *Istoriia Moho Pokolinnya* 171.

²⁴⁴ Maistrenko *Istoriia Moho Pokolinnya* 157.

On 14 June 1921 at the Kostyantyniv Soviet when UKP deputies criticised the NEP they were expelled. This campaign was particularly aimed at the UKP in the Donets area to break their activities in the industrial working class.²⁴⁵

In this hostile environment numerous internal disagreements arose and after the July plenum of the Central Committee of the UKP there were various splits. There was a breach with the Foreign Group of the UKP, which dissolved on 5 October 1921. In early December 1921, Yurko Mazurenko left along with the Central Committee members Yavorsky, Kulynychenko, Smon and Maistrenko over the position on NEP. All of them were admitted to the KP(b)U; Mazurenko was appointed the collegium member of the People's Commissariat of Justice. Lapchynsky was appointed the USSR Consul General in Lviv removing him from activity.

In general terms, the publishing activity of the UKP in late 1921 strongly decreased because the authorities stopped supplying paper. In late 1920, *Chervony Prapor* turned to cyclostyle printing and was issued once a month as a thicker periodical. As such the UKP actually lost its main organ.²⁴⁶

Third All-Ukrainian Congress of the UKP (1922)

In 1922 in such difficult conditions the UKP continued its open agitation against the Russian Communist policy of the NEP. The Kyiv committee issued a leaflet in September 1922 which defiantly declared:

The Unbound hands of the capitalist will not be satisfied with the lease of factories, they will reach out for state power and we must say that if the New Economic Policy continues to develop and the proletariat stay passive and deprived of their rights, under the current bureaucratization and the detachment of power from the working masses—capitalists can seize power.²⁴⁷

In October 1922 the Third Congress of the UKP was convened in Kharkiv. Once again a message of support was sent to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International taking place in November. A telegram from the Central Committee was sent to the Executive Committee of the Comintern and other leading bodies protesting against the arrest of members of the UKP. A further appeal was issued to workers and peasants of Ukraine in protest against the arrest and persecution of UKP members from the Katerynoslav and Kharkiv organisations of the UKP.

The conference reaffirmed the need for a "struggle against the NEP, the transformation of the state aparat and bourgeois-NEP decay within". As an alternative the UKP called for the development of an economic union of cooperative societies which should be duly developed, with creation of

²⁴⁵ Chyrko 34-5.

²⁴⁶ Maistrenko *Istoriia Moho Pokolinnya* 163.

²⁴⁷ TsDAHO, F.8, O.1, D.89—Ukrainian Communist Party. A letter of Kyiv province committee to the members and sympathisers, Kyiv, September 1922.

All-Ukrainian centres, with the "possibility for the local working masses of independent activity".²⁴⁸ The conference also agreed plans to a new party programme to be drawn up by Richytsky.

In the interim period until the next UKP conference significant changes occurred: the regime had become stabilised, there was a degree of economic recovery, and end to the international blockade. On 30 December 1922 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was created completing the federalisation of the former Tsarist Empire. In April 1923 the Seventh Congress of the KP(b)U formally began the policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenisation), known in Ukraine as "Ukrainisation". This was a programme of "positive action" with regard to language, culture and promotion of non-Russians in the soviet, party, trade unions and cooperative apparatus. With no change at all in the revolutionary democracy of the republic it confirmed the UKP's earlier caution regarding the fragility of cultural concessions. On 20 October 1923, they issued an "Appeal to the deputies of the village, volost and district councils and the congress of councils".²⁴⁹

The working masses deputies in the Councils [soviets] should help to counter-balance products of agriculture and industry which is possible only through the wide cooperation of agriculture, urban-rural exchange, state crediting of agriculture, elimination of speculation and agency, reduction of the role of the state apparatus, transfer of the state industry products through the distributive apparatus of cooperatives and state bodies exclusively.²⁵⁰

At a meeting in Katerynoslav one UKP activist Oliinik declared that:

Moscow and Leningrad industry uses Ukrainian coal and Ukrainian metal, and in (Ketrynoslav), even though we have factories working, but they don't profit the workers and peasants much because the cast iron they make is all exported to Great Russia.²⁵¹

Another UKP member Neklesa went further, calling for "Down with the KP(b)U" and that Tsar "Nikolai built memorials, they are gone—Lenin's memorials will go too". Such activity provoked outrage in the official press, with numerous articles denouncing UKP activity²⁵¹.

In particular in the cities of Katerynoslav the Ukrainian Communists gained significant influence among the workers. A series of petitions in protest were submitted to the authorities with 1500 signatures from various factories; they called for legalisation of the UKP press and recognition of the UKP by the Communist International.²⁵² The UKP continued to publish what was a forerunner of Samizdat, *Chervony Prapor* was on occasions circulated in a handwritten

²⁴⁸ TsDAHO, This was reaffirmed at the 3rd Kyiv province conference of the UKP. Fond 8, O.1, D.96.

²⁴⁹ TsDAHO, F.8, O.1, D.96.

²⁵⁰ TsDAHO, F.8, O.1, D.96.

²⁵¹ Cited in Mykola Halahan "Likvidatsiia UKP", *Nova Ukraina*, Vol. 4, no. 1, 1925, pp. 33-34.

²⁵² Katernynoslav Protesty robitnikiv—TsDAHO, F.8, O.1, D.117.

edition with numerous leaflets in protest at repressions.²⁵³ Harassment was combined with subterfuge: in 1923 a "Left fraction of the UKP" formed which in the opinion of Richytsky were provocateurs organised by the Gosudarstvennoye Politiche eskoye Upravlenie (GPU). They were duly expelled from the UKP that year.²⁵⁴

The Fourth Conference of the UKP (1925)

In the last year of its existence despite being the subject of a determined effort to close it down, the Ukrainian Communist Party actually began to increase its agitation. In January 1924 Lenin died; it was the beginning of the struggle in the RKP(B) against the Trotskyist Left Opposition. The only opposition however in Soviet Ukraine was the UKP. That month an "Appeal of Central Committee of the UKP to workers and peasants of Ukraine" stated:

The New Economic Policy is the turn from socialism back to capitalism, it is return of enterprises to capitalist leaseholders, it is the moving even of state industry to capitalist grounds with the removing of workers administration of enterprises and substituting it with bourgeois specialists and ex-capitalists. The New Economic Policy is recognising that workers themselves cannot organise the enterprise, that the capitalist can do that with old methods. It is depriving workers of the right to manage production; it is weakening the village poor's influence and strengthening the role of the village rich. The New Economic Policy is the freedom of trade, not only small but also big, and transforming the state from the instrument of distribution to the wholesale buyer.

But every worker remembers that under such policy, that is under capitalism, he was poor and hungry as well, though there wasn't such an economic ruin at that time. And it is clear that now from the very beginning of the new policy terrible exploitation of workers has begun; unemployment is rising, as well as speculation and profits of the bourgeoisie. So, the main difference of the current policy from the previous is that the former frees our class enemy—the bourgeoisie—from that strict regime established as a result of the proletariat's victory and gives it a possibility to gather strength for the fight against communism.²⁵⁵

The UKP warned that in the USSR it was the bureaucracy, not working people who ruled, the state was becoming more bourgeois and "the state will not always be on the proletariat's side and it will support leaseholders and kurkuls [Kulaks] and sacrifice the interests of workers and the village poor in the name of revival of the industry". The alternative posed called for "all power in the soviet state to belong not with the bureaucratic apparatus of functionaries, appointed from above", but "to the elected councils of workers and peasant deputies."²⁵⁶

²⁵³ TsDAHO, F.8, O.1, D.118.

²⁵⁴ Mace 82.

²⁵⁵ Appeal of CC UKP to workers and peasants of Ukraine, January 1924, Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromadskykh obednan Ukrainy, TsDAHO F.8, O.1, D.1.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

They argued that political rights and freedoms should belong to the working masses not just for “petit-bourgeois and intelligentsia elements”. That Ukrainian trade unions “be organized in an All-Ukrainian scale with an elective independent center, an equitable member of the red trade-union international”.²⁵⁷

In May 1924 the KP(b)U conference voted their support for Stalin against the Left Opposition; Medvedev spoke on the need for purging various elements. It wasn't long before the UKP was under fire again. On 20 July 1924 the First Secretary of the KP(b)U Central Committee, Kviring, responded to UKP calls for a “united communist front” saying: “No. Only the UKP self-liquidation, its complete separation from the past and honest joining us may be discussed; we recommend the Ukapists to do this anyhow.”²⁵⁸

The UKP turned again to the Communist International, in a statement on 27 August 1924 from the CC of the UKP regarding relations between the UKP and KP(b)U, written by Richytsky and Drahomyretsky.²⁵⁹ They noted that they had several times approached the Comintern with notes and declarations and sent delegations to the Second and Third congresses, to no avail; they had received no response or explanation for their exclusion. The Executive had passed no opinion at all, even though the UKP had accepted the Comintern platform, charter and twenty-one conditions of admission. But at the same time the Comintern had not expressed condemnation of the UKP nor sought to terminate its existence. There were two communist parties in Ukraine, they explained and one of them (UKP) is organised as a party of this country, the other the KP(b)U “is just a subsidiary of another country's party (Russia)”.

This contradiction in the labour movement in Ukraine—existence of two parties—will be resolved through the inevitable historical process of consolidation of Ukraine: a country on the edge of losing its dependent colonial position and constitutional establishment of the proletariat as hegemonic class of its country. UKP aims to complete this process as soon as possible: to unite the Ukrainian proletariat based on the Ukrainian centres and legitimacy within international labour movement. This is where our aspiration to unite with KP(b)U comes from.

The UKP conditions for unity included: unity into one party separate from Russian Communist Party (RCP) as an equal section of the Comintern, an independent Ukrainian trade union movement, a Ukrainian Red Army. In terms of Ukraine in the USSR the UKP no longer insisted on independence: the UKP demanded “concentration of all governance—administrative and economic—within the borders of soviet republics and in hands of local soviet governments” with the central USSR government “to be in charge of regulative, planning and general directive functions”.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ “Is the Joint Front with the UKP Possible?” *Komunist* 20 July 1924.

²⁵⁹ Lyst TsK Vikonkomu Kominternu Pro Vzayemovidnosyny mizh UKP i KP(b)U [Letter from CC of UCP to Comintern regarding relation between UKP and CP(b)U 27 August 1924, *Dokumenty Trachichnoii Istorii Ukraini (1917-1927)*, P. Bachinskyi, ed., Kyiv 1999, pp. 522-25.

Placing all material resources in hands of the Soviet central government, that autonomy favours distortion of proletarian unity towards bureaucratic centralism and power of central mechanisms which is under non-proletarian officials who are nourishing an imperial-bourgeois-public movement.

Only on these principles was a truly "proletarian solution of the colonial question of the former Russian Empire possible as well as creation of genuine proletarian unity of soviet republics". This was contrasted with the distorting "bourgeois tendencies of bureaucratic centralism":

Propaganda of these principles among working masses met resistance from KP(b)U. It is significant that the policy of repression against the UKP was intensified during first years of NEP which boosted the development of private trade capital and growth of pro-Russian and colonial tendencies. This policy of repression was the result of the influence of small commercial city bourgeoisie on the ruling body and through layers of petty bourgeois on the ruling proletarian party.

The UKP proposed a "united communist front" with the KP(b)U to help overcome their differences. The turn towards the policy of Ukrainisation offered a new possibility, though the UKP cautioned that "the turn on national politics is yet only expressed by satisfaction of national intelligentsia in the cultural and linguistic questions". It did not touch the economic, political and administrative dimensions, important for the workers and peasants. Despite the desire for reconciliation "the persecution of UKP has begun again, especially as a result of our growing influence in Katerynoslav". They sought the intervention of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) "to stop persecution of communists by communists and creating an atmosphere that will promote our further cooperation".

The KP(b)U also submitted a counter-memorandum by Skrypnyk, Shumsky and Popov.²⁶⁰ The response was a refutation of the entire tradition of the USDRP, which was branded as "until 1917 in political and organisational questions in general and whole joined to the Russian Mensheviks". The revolutionary wing of the movement in Ukraine was represented, from one side, by the organisations of the RSDRP Bolsheviks, and from the other side, "partially by the so called Ukrainian Social-Democratic Union (the Spilka), also part of the RSDRP". This ignored the fact that Tkachenko, founder of the UKP was also a leader of the Spilka! The whole account was of the USDRP as a component of the counter-revolution. There was little differentiation between the left and right of the Ukrainian revolution, portraying the UKP as one in a list of minority trends repulsed by the "counter-revolutionary politics, conducted by the USDRP under the Rada, Hetman and Directorate". The role of the Nezalezhnyky was distorted. It was claimed that

The party of independent Ukrainian Social-Democrats strived to mobilise the working masses of the Ukraine not against the still unconquered Petluyuraism,

²⁶⁰ Memorandum Tsk KP(b) U Vikonkomu Kominternu (Mazurenko 547-58).

not against the surrounding and partially occupying revolutionary Ukraine army of the Entente and Denikin, but against the workers and peasants of Russia, against the strengthening in the center of the Soviet power of the RSFSR, that is, against the most reliable and strongest ally of Soviet Ukraine.

The Nezalezhnyky were associated with commanders with whom they had no connections, such as Hrihoriev and even Petlyura. With the formation of the UKP, it "continued to play into the hand of counter-revolution, for the best way to victory of counter-revolution on Ukraine lay through the isolation of Soviet Ukraine from Soviet Russia". The growth of the UKP was explained as due to those diverse elements hostile to the KP(b)U, as "the only opposition party, which remained". The whole tone of the KP(b)U memorandum was that the UKP should be liquidated due to being "a centre of attraction for various anti-Soviet elements".²⁶¹

On 28 November 1924, the UKP re-submitted their memorandum of 1920. In their covering letter the UKP stated that the "leading organs of the Comintern should, finally, interfere in inter-party affairs in Ukraine and give a definite answer to the question about our existence and our relations with KP(b)U". The response was that following the hearings of a Comintern Executive commission the Presidium of the Comintern passed a resolution on 24 December 1924 to disband the UKP and fuse hand-picked elements into the KP(b)U. It said, among, other things, that "the former Ukrainian Social Democrats (Nezalezhnyky), who a year before conducted an armed struggle against Soviet power", had moved into "the camp of Communism":

But accepting the general principles of the Communist programme, the UKP committed distortions on the national and colonial questions, treating contemporary Soviet Ukraine as [a state] which leans on external forces, demanding a form of interstate relations between the Ukrainian SSR and other Soviet republics... These distortions of the Communist programme in the practice of the UKP were the consequence of the remnants of those socialist-chauvinist views which used to be held by its members... The UKP worked against the RCP and KP(b)U, making propaganda for such a separation of the Ukrainian state machinery, the Ukrainian army, and Ukrainian workers' movement, which in fact leads to its opposition to other Soviet republics, [and] thus the UKP worked objectively in the direction of a national fragmentation of the forces of the proletarian dictatorship in Ukraine, independently of the aim which it put before itself.²⁶²

On 1-4 March 1925 the Fourth Conference of the UKP took place in Kharkiv attended by a delegation of heavyweights from the KP(b)U Central Committee.²⁶³ Some members demanded the Comintern instructions be

²⁶¹ Chyrko 34.

²⁶² Borys *Sovietization of Ukraine* 432-3 n.57.

²⁶³ The KP(b)U Central Committee members who attended the UKP conference included Petrovsky, Kviring, V.Ya. Chubar, I.E. Klimenko, M.O. Skrypnyk, M.M. Popov, O.I. Butsenko, K.O. Kirkizh (Chyrko 35).

reconsidered; this was duly blocked by KP(b)U representatives Chubar and Klimenko. Under such pressure the congress decided: "To consider the UKP as separate party disbanded". It brought to an end twenty years of existence of independent Ukrainian Marxist organisation.

Conclusion

The Soviet historian Volodymyr Chyrko contends that the UKP "were ideologically defeated; they organisationally collapsed and perished because the ideas and policy of the Communist Party triumphed".²⁶⁴ This is mirrored by James Mace, a historian of the national school, who concludes that: "Never numerous, the Ukapisty were no political threat to the Bolshevik regime in Ukraine."²⁶⁵ In fact at a time when opposition in the RKP was suppressed the still open opposition of the UKP, despite the impediments, continued their agitation and actually began to increase their influence. In response the regime ratcheted up their efforts to check the UKP until finally disbanding them.

According to Chyrko the experience of the UKP disproves "that a single-party system was established in our country as a consequence of Bolsheviks not being willing to collaborate with anyone". There is no doubt that the Bolsheviks did work with others, but it was a relationship strained by conflicting conceptions amongst the Bolsheviks and other parties as to exactly what revolution they were creating. A conflict summed up by the *Nezalezhnyky* in 1918 as between the dictatorship of the workers and peasants or the dictatorship of a section of the proletariat and of its own party. In the end the latter won out and the revolution was consumed in its triumph.

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²⁶⁴ Chyrko 24.

²⁶⁵ Mace 83.

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